CATASTROPHE TESTIMONY: BEARING WITNESS TO THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL EXISTENTIAL AND MORAL CHASM BETWEEN SURVIVORS AND THE WORLD

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I certify that all the material in this dissertation which is not my own work has been identified and that any material that has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University has been acknowledged

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ABSTRACT

Catastrophe testimony is the testimony of survivors of traumatic experiences involving deliberately inflicted physical and psychological violence. In this dissertation I examine the testimonies of survivors of rape, torture and imprisonment in Auschwitz and other concentration camps. My objective is to explore how such testimonies bear witness to the epistemological, existential and moral chasm between the survivors and the world - those who have no lived experience of being the victim of such catastrophic experiences. In Part One of the dissertation, I describe the origins and theme of the dissertation, and my overall aims. In Part Two I explore the epistemological chasm, reviewing the 'classical' reductionist and anti-reductionist accounts of belief justification and knowledge creation, and more recent epistemic agent-centred accounts, notably Inference to the Best Explanation and Virtue Epistemology. I find that none of these 'informational' accounts can be adapted to permit the evaluation of non-propositional testimonial content. The epistemological chasm thus equates to that part of what is revealed by testifiers in their testimony which cannot be justifiably believed or become known through the application of accepted epistemic rules and practices. In Part Three of the dissertation, I begin my exploration of the existential and moral chasm between survivors and the world with a discussion of memory and especially episodic memory. I then consider specifically the evaluation of catastrophe testimony primarily by psychologists and psychotherapists, and also by historians and socio-political theorists. Finally, in Part Four, which is the core of the dissertation, I examine how selected survivors see themselves and judge the world through their testimonies, and also how societies, and specifically perpetrator societies, respond to their findings. Parts Three and Four of the dissertation enable me to delineate the nature and extent of the existential and moral chasms between survivors and the world. I conclude that the epistemological, existential and moral chasm between survivors and the world is a matter which should continue to concern us, but not a problem which can be solved.

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PART ONE

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1. BACKGROUND AND GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Origins of this Dissertation

My interest in the issues examined in this dissertation was first aroused by five essays written by the Austrian essayist Jean Améry (born Hans Maier, in Vienna, in 1912)[1], and published in his book *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne* (*Beyond Guilt and Atonement*), originally written in 1966 and first translated into English under the title *At the Mind's Limits* in 1980. Améry had been a victim of the Third Reich in three capacities. First as a three-quarters Jew, he had been forced to flee his native Austria, with his Jewish wife, at the end of 1938, and take refuge in Belgium. Secondly, he had been arrested by the Gestapo in July 1943 whilst working as a member of a small German-speaking resistance group operating in Brussels, and handed over to the SS, who had tortured him as a potential informant, unaware of his Jewish identity, and then imprisoned him for several months in solitary confinement at Fort Breendonk, a concentration camp situated on the Belgian coast. Finally, after his Jewish identity had been revealed he had been transported to Auschwitz in January 1944, where he remained until January 1945. After Auschwitz was evacuated, Améry was first forced to march on foot and then transported by open rail truck to Dora-Mittelbau, and finally sent to Bergen-Belsen, from which he was liberated in April 1945 (Heidelberger-Leonard, 2010: 61-63).

[1] Jean Améry was the name he assumed in 1955, having settled permanently in Brussels, both in his everyday life, and as a writer. It was an acknowledgement of his choice to live the rest of his life in francophone Belgium, but his adopted surname, also represented an anagram of 'Mayer', his preferred spelling of his Austrian surname. The poet and novelist Anne Michaels suggests that in distorting his given name Améry, was 'simultaneously creating a hiding place and exposing a violated self' (Michaels, 2020: 36).

Reading the essays in Améry's book was the start of a journey of discovery for me. They addressed some major existential themes arising out of his experiences as a victim and survivor of the Third Reich in an essayistic rather than a straightforwardly anecdotal manner. They were originally written as texts for a series of broadcasts by Améry to listeners of the German regional radio station *Süddeutscher Rundfunk,* beginning in early 1964, shortly after the commencement of the major trial in Frankfurt of a number of former members of the SS who had served in Auschwitz. Améry's *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne* essays are the work for which he is most widely known as a writer, although he wrote and broadcast a number of other important essays on political and cultural themes, particularly between 1966 and his death in 1978, as well as autobiographically inspired books and works of fiction. Though never as widely acclaimed as other writers of survivor testimonies such as Primo Levi, interest in Améry's writings has been growing in recent years, particularly in anglophone circles.[2] Nevertheless, the ranks of those who have held his work in high esteem have included W. G Sebald, Imre Kertesz, Alfred Andersch, Elias Canetti, Ingeborg Bachmann, and Primo Levi .

Describing, in the Preface to the first edition of *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne,* his approach to writing his essays, Améry said he had not wanted to write a 'documentary report' of his experiences, but rather 'a phenomenological description of the existence of the victim' (Améry, 1999, Preface to the First Edition: xiii). His own existential condition as a victim and survivor of the Nazi regime, which he regarded as irreversible, and unchangeable, was marked by the renunciation of his former 'German' identity, which he condemned retrospectively as inauthentic. His childhood, and adolescence, as a provincial, self-consciously Austrian, youth, he declared, though admittedly happy, had been in retrospect a 'masquerade', and his love for his native land, and its people based on 'an existential misunderstanding'. 'What we thought had constituted our nature' he asked, 'was it ever anything else but mimicry?' (Améry, 1999: 50). On the other hand, his cultural identity as a left-wing German intellectual and writer had been both real and central to his existence, and his intellectual life as a survivor became focused on regaining it, and also on the restoration more generally of his dignity as a human being- the right to be someone thought 'worthy of life' which he declared had been

[2] See, for example, Sebald (2003), Brudholm (2008), Heidelberger-Leonard 2010), Kertesz (2011), Zolkos (2010, 2011), Cheyette (2013).

stripped from him, and all Jews by the Third Reich. However, rather than return to live in Austria, Améry chose to live out his life in Brussels, as a permanent exile.

His existence as a survivor, and especially one whose German cultural and educational roots still defined his intellectual and cultural life was, said Améry, fundamentally one of extreme *loneliness*. He wanted to end it, but on his own terms, and by 1964 he had come to realise that this was practically impossible. The German people had moved on beyond the era of guilt and atonement, which they had in any event never sincerely embraced, to one of political rehabilitation and economic restoration, and self-reinvention as a tolerant and democratic society. It was moreover a society in which 'resentful' former victims of the Third Reich such as himself, far from being honoured, were *themselves* resented as visible reminders of the country's shameful past and continually subjected to social pressure to forgive, and be reconciled, or at least to remain silent. Of course such a reaction might be expected in cases where the majority of a population are implicated, if not as perpetrators or accomplices then at least as indifferent bystanders, in the crimes of nations. However, one of the discoveries I was to make in the course of exploring the relationship between survivors of catastrophic experiences and the world was the extent to which the mere fact of being a former victim, however innocent, of a catastrophic experience can render a survivor, if not a social pariah, then at least a social outsider.

As a testifier, Améry's sense of isolation was compounded by another phenomenon which was to prove general among testifiers- the impossibility of finding a common language in which to communicate what he had experienced to others. In the essay in which he recounted his experience of being tortured at Fort Breendonk, for example he dismissed any attempt to describe the pain he experienced as involving a totally senseless 'merry-go-round of figurative speech'(ibid. :33) Qualities of feeling such as the pain of torture, he declared, were as incomparable as they were indescribable: 'They mark the limit of the capacity of language to communicate' (ibid.). Améry had in effect been caught on the horns of a dilemma which other testifiers would also face between the desire to invoke in his audience some kind of sympathetic response to his suffering on the one hand, and the desire to avoid banalizing it by giving it a name, such as 'hunger', 'pain' or 'fear', to which they could attach an everyday meaning on the other. Catastrophe testimony, I was to discover, however emotionally revelatory it might be, is never truly intimate.

I surmised that these testifier-side issues probably arose in some form or another in the testimony of other survivors of the Holocaust, or of other genocidal actions, or torture, and perhaps beyond these also that of survivors of other violent, deliberately inflicted, personal assaults, such as rape. It also seemed plausible that the problems Améry had encountered as a survivor in attempting to re-engage personally and through testimony with the world might reflect a more generally experienced societal dilemma for survivors of catastrophic experiences, though obviously his case was a very particular one. At the same time, it seemed necessary to explore not only what can be *told*, but also what can be *heard*, through what I decided to call catastrophe testimony. How far could recipients of such testimony comprehend what they were being told, beyond the 'what, where and when' of survivor experiences, and indeed how far would they feel the need to do so? How far would those who had not shared the experience of testifiers seek, or be equipped, to engage competently with the complex and distressing story they had been told without surrendering to incomprehension, or the temptation to cognitively repackage it in line with more familiar, or less discomforting, social, political, psychological, or cultural, narratives? That is how what became my attempt to explore the epistemological, existential and moral chasm between survivors of catastrophic experiences, on the one hand, and the world as represented by their listeners and readers, on the other, began.

1.2 What Is Catastrophe Testimony?

The broadest definition of testimony is the act of one person *telling* another person something. However, the study of testimony has been traditionally seen an object of epistemological enquiry, and in that context its definition has become narrowed in two important respects. First, the notion of testifying has come to be associated with the notion of conveying information, and thus testimonial 'telling' has come to mean *propositional* telling – that which occurs when a testifier tells someone *that p*. Secondly the context in which the telling occurs has come to be assumed as that of a speech act, in which a statement that *p* is uttered by a speaker to a present hearer, or a group of hearers, such as when giving someone the time of day, or directions to the railway station, or giving evidence in a criminal trial. However, whilst catastrophe testimony certainly typically conveys propositional information – about when and where a catastrophic experience occurred, the identity of the perpetrator(s) and the nature of the atrocities they committed, for example – this is neither

the full extent of the content of such testimony, nor necessarily its most important or valuable element. And whilst catastrophe testimony is sometimes presented in the form of a speech act, it may also be presented in a variety of other forms, such as an audio or video recording, a radio or televisual broadcast, or a published autobiographical work in a documentary, essayistic, fictionalised, or poetic form, the recipients of which may be unidentified, or even unknown.

However, it is the subject matter of catastrophe testimony rather than the epistemological nature of its content, or its presentation or transmission, which is its defining characteristic- the catastrophic experience suffered by the testifier. A catastrophic experience as defined herein is one involving the intentional and violent infliction of pain and suffering, often including a threat to life or limb, resulting in serious and lasting physical and psychological trauma. Being a victim of rape, for instance, is a catastrophic experience, whereas being a victim of a serious car accident is not, although both may result in severe physical and psychological trauma. A catastrophic experience may be the result of a personally targeted action, such as torture, or individual cases of rape, or collectively targeted actions, such as those connected with forced mass deportations, various kinds of group enslavement, imprisonment in concentration camps, or other persecutions of particular groups, races, or people, including acts of genocide. The term 'catastrophe testimony' also embraces testimony relating to the existential, psychological and moral experience of being a survivor of the catastrophic experience in question.

The content of catastrophe testimony invariably includes non-propositional or introspective elements reflecting its essential nature as a phenomenal account of the subjectively felt experience of victimhood or survival. In addition, it may also contain declarations of a political, social, cultural and moral nature, such as expressions of condemnation or resentment concerning the failure of society, or sections of society, to sufficiently acknowledge or accept responsibility or atone for the ordeals suffered by the testifier and other victims or survivors similar catastrophic experiences. Thus, I am inclined to think of catastrophe testimony as essentially *sui generis*; testimony in a variety of forms in which propositional and non-propositional elements are interwoven and narrativized in the context of the testifier's objectives in bearing witness to the particular catastrophic experience in question, or its existential legacy.

The proportion of catastrophe testimony which epistemologists might accept as constituting epistemically evaluable propositional telling relative to the testimony as a whole is thus something which can be determined only on a case- by- case basis. In fact, it cannot be assumed that the testifier's primary objective in testifying is necessarily the provision of propositional information to recipients. Améry for example intentionally avoided the inclusion of what he called 'documentary' information – roughly propositional data - in his essays, save where required in the context of the subject under discussion, preferring to concentrate on conveying his own phenomenal experience of victimhood and survival and essayistic meditations invoked by them. By the same token, the importance or value of such propositional information to the recipient cannot be assumed, and will largely depend on his or her interest in evaluating the testimony. It might, for example, be of vital importance to a lawyer seeking evidence in relation to the prosecution of a perpetrator, or a historian seeking to write a definitive account of the catastrophic event in question, but of lesser importance to a psychotherapist who regards her patient's 'trauma story' primarily as a psychological tool to be employed in helping his or her recovery rather than a record of their experiences. In fact, the most widely read testimonies are probably those autobiographical works published for general public consumption to those whose interest in hearing or reading them may have no particular epistemic or other orientation.

So there can be no hard and fast rules about the form or content of catastrophe testimony. The most important factors in determining its form, content or aims in my experience are contextual. One important factor I have found for instance is the time of its writing relative to the occurrence of the catastrophic event. Whilst testimonies written shortly after the occurrence of the catastrophic experiences they describe, such as Primo Levi's *If This is a Man*, or Charlotte Delbo's *None of Us will Return,* seem to me to be driven primarily by cathartic, and revelatory impulses, and tend to be anecdotal, (and thus sometimes more propositional) in nature, those written several years after the event often appear more preoccupied with the existential, societal or moral discontents of survival, such as the sense of being estranged from, or abandoned by contemporary society. This underlines the fact that testimony relating to past events, is always written from the perspective of the time of writing, and the greater the time which has elapsed between the two, the more the testifier's account of her experiences can be influenced by the testifier's experience of survival, as well as what she

may have learned about the past in the intervening period. It is for this reason that some commentators regard contemporary diaries as more reliable accounts of what happened in the past than autobiographical accounts of events written years later. Certainly, some such 'long distance' autobiographical testimonies can sometimes appear to be a somewhat negatively influenced by the discontents of survival. This, though, is not always the case- Kathryn Freedman's account of surviving rape in her book *One Hour in Paris*, written 24 years after the event, for example is a positive story of recovery, and social reconnection, however incomplete or contingent.

Another crucial characteristic of catastrophe testimony is its source, which lies not only in *episodic memory* -memory of things which happened in the past – but in the episodic memory of traumatic experiences. I examine the debate around the role of memory generally in Chapter 5 below, and in relation to traumatic experiences specifically in Chapter 7 below.

1.3 Overall Aim and Structure of This Dissertation

The primary aim of this dissertation is to explore how catastrophe testimony reveals the epistemological, existential and moral chasm between testifiers and the world – those individuals and societies to which they return or with which they seek to engage as survivors. It focuses on those issues primarily from the perspective of survivors themselves. At the same time, researching and writing this dissertation has also proved to be something of a journey. At the beginning it seemed to me that the issues to be addressed were largely epistemological – questions such as whether and how one can to form justified true beliefs, or acquire knowledge through catastrophe testimony, given that the experiences described in such testimony were so extreme, and lay so far outside the lived experience of those who had not themselves undergone comparable experiences. Gradually, though, it became clear that to address the issue only from an epistemological perspective was to confine its scope to that part of the testimonial content which could be properly regarded as conveying propositional information, which neither reflected the true scope, value and importance of such testimony in a philosophical context nor the apparent aims of testifiers in testifying to their experiences. The key to how to expand the scope of my enquiry beyond the epistemological seemed to me to lie in Améry's insistence, in his Preface to the Reissue of *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne* that to be a survivor of a catastrophic experience such as his own was an existential condition 'which is unchangeable' (Améry, 1999, Preface to the Reissue; ix). What, therefore, I would

need to address beyond purely epistemological issues were those relating to the nature of that existential condition: broadly speaking the introspective element of surviving one's survival, and the social element of re-engaging (or not) with post-traumatic society. The remainder of this dissertation is in effect a record of my attempt to carry out that task.

The structure of this dissertation essentially follows the philosophical journey described above. It begins, in Part Two of the dissertation, with a review of a number of epistemological accounts of how testimonial beliefs can become justified true beliefs and yield knowledge, and discusses their applicability to and their limitations as accounts of catastrophe testimony. I then explore various accounts of the workings of memory as a testimonial source. In Part Three of the dissertation I move on to examine the existential condition of being a victim and survivor of a catastrophic experience, and the existential and moral chasm between testifiers and the world, from an outsider perspective. Finally, in Part Four of the dissertation I examine those issues from the perspectives of survivors themselves, through a selection of survivor testimonies: those of Karyn L. Freedman, a victim of rape, Jean Améry, a victim of torture and of imprisonment in Auschwitz, Charlotte Delbo, a non- Jewish political prisoner in Auschwitz and other concentration camps, Primo Levi a Jewish prisoner in Auschwitz, and Ruth Kluger, a Jewish prisoner in a number of Nazi camps, including Auschwitz. These encompass not only three different kinds of catastrophic experience, but also catastrophic experiences which were both individually and collectively experienced. Finally, in the Epilogue, I consider what has been learned concerning the role of testimony in bearing witness to the epistemological, existential and moral chasm between survivors of catastrophic experience and the world.

PART TWO

CATASTROPHE TESTIMONY AS AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL PHENOMENON

CHAPTER 2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 Testimony From an Epistemological Perspective

Testimony, as a subject of philosophical inquiry, has been treated historically as primarily the province of epistemologists, though epistemological discourse relating to memory has in recent years also been influenced by developments in the fields of psychology and cognitive science as discussed in Chapter 5 below. However, as Jennifer Lackey notes, 'the central focus in the epistemology of testimony is not on the nature of testimony itself, but instead on how justified belief, or knowledge, is acquired on the basis of what other people tell us' (Lackey,2011: 71). Moreover, epistemologists have typically addressed this question as one of prescribing evaluatory rules or criteria of evaluation, notwithstanding the many different kinds of interactions which may be described as testimony, and have also generally continued to treat testimony as a speech act addressed by a speaker to a hearer, notwithstanding the increasing variety of forms in which testimony, including catastrophe testimony, may actually be transmitted.

Given the range and diversity of different kinds of testimony, from giving directions to a nearby location, or telling someone the time of day, to giving formal evidence in judicial proceedings, it is not surprising that there appears to be no general agreement among epistemologists regarding a standard definition of testimony. Some epistemologists choose to define testimony in the widest terms, such as 'tellings in general (i.e. with no restrictions either on subject matter, or on the speaker's epistemic relation to it)' (Fricker, 1995: 396-7), or 'the intentional transmission of information in general' (Pritchard, 2014: 80). Robert Audi suggests that testimony is 'virtually any instance of someone's telling somebody something

where this is *telling that*---propositional telling--- as opposed to *telling to*---imperatival telling', adding that 'telling that' is 'roughly a matter of saying the kind of thing from which we learn facts from other people' (Audi 2006: 25). C.A.J Coady, on the other hand, opts for a relatively narrow definition of testimony. He first distinguishes 'formal' testimony - that offered as evidence in a court of law or similar forum, in which rules regulating the content or presentation of testimony are generally applied - and 'natural' testimony - any other testimonial encounter in which 'we have a speaker engaged in the speech act of testifying to the truth of some proposition which is either in dispute or in some way in need of determination and his attestation is evidence towards the settling of the matter' (Coady 1992: 38). In Coady's view, all testimony, including natural testimony, must both be *offered* as evidence for a proposition *p,* and provide *actual evidence* for the truth of the stated proposition *p,* by a testifier having the 'the relevant competence, authority, or credentials to state truly that *p',* and be directed to those in need of such evidence. (ibid: 42). As Peter Graham (1997) points out, these conditions appear somewhat onerous when applied, for instance, to someone giving directions to the post office, whilst Elizabeth Fricker suggests that Coady's assumption that testimony is always delivered 'by-someone-in-a-position-to-know-about-the-matter-in-question' is 'tendentious' (Fricker, 1995: 39).

It must, however, be evident to most observers that giving a stranger directions, or telling her the time of day, teaching or instructing a child, offering an expert view on a scientific, or historical question, giving evidence in a murder trial, or rendering an account of an act of genocide one may have witnessed, not only constitute fundamentally different categories of testimony, but also involve acts of testifying which make materially different demands on the testifier, and the recipient(s) of her testimony. Indeed, it should be evident that even two testimonial encounters of the same general nature may be materially different in reality; for example, a request for directions to the nearest post office, and a request, made in bad weather, for directions to the safest route off a mountain. Consequently, however one defines testimony, what is at stake for the testifier in testifying, or for the recipient of her testimony in accepting her utterance as true, depends largely on the context and situation of the testimonial encounter, the nature of the testimony, and the individual characters and motivations of the parties. And that is particularly true of catastrophe testimony.

2.2 The Epistemic Status Of Testimony

As Lackey observed, epistemological interest in testimony is focused on its how it can yield justified true beliefs, or disseminate knowledge. The underlying question in this context is whether testimony is or can be an independent source of justified true belief like perception, inferential reasoning, or memory, or whether its function in the epistemic chain is purely that of transmitting propositional information originating from one or more of these other sources. It is a separate issue whether testimony is merely a means of transmitting *knowledge* acquired from other sources or a locus of knowledge in itself, and this is by no means a settled issue among epistemologists. In the specific case of catastrophe testimony, however, we have already established that its primary source is episodic memory, or more precisely recollection, and this is true whether one takes the *preservationist* view that memory is a faculty for recording and reproducing an original image of a past event or experience, or the *generativist* view that memory is part of a wider cognitive process of continuously adapting, constructing or reconstructing memory beliefs, including at the time of their retrieval for transmission as testimony (see, further, Chapter 5). However, if one takes the preservationist view, it seems to follow that one believes that the role of testimony is purely transmissive, whereas if one takes the generativist view, it seems to follow that one believes that recollection rather than memory is the *locus* of any knowledge acquired as a result of the utterance (as is more fully explained in Chapter 5). Jean Améry, on the other hand, further complicates this issue when he claims that only in the process of *writing* about his experience as a prisoner in Auschwitz was he able to fully recall, and thus retrieve, the memories of what he had experienced as a victim of the Third Reich (Améry, 1999, Preface: xiii). This implies that the causal link between memory and testimony is not necessarily as fixed as one might suppose- that the *act* of testifying can *invoke* memory, in which case it is if not the source of memory then at least the possible trigger for remembering. None of this of course affects the issue of whether, and to what extent, beliefs produced by a particular act of testifying might or might not constitute justified true beliefs or generate knowledge in the case in question, which is a separate issue.

2.3 Justifying Testimonially Transmitted Beliefs

When somebody tells me that *p*, and I accept the propositional content of what she tells me as true, I acquire a testimonially transmitted belief that *p*. However, my belief is not

necessarily justified; the information transmitted to me may have been false, misleading, or unreliable. And unlike in the case of other sources of belief, such as perception or reasoning, in order to acquire a justified testimonial belief, my evaluation of the attested proposition involves me interrogating not merely my own senses, or rationality, but also the credibility of a *third-party* - the testifier. Thus the question of *how* I may become epistemically entitled to make this assessment lies at the heart of the debate on testimonial justification.

The contemporary epistemological debate surrounding this question of how we can form, and justify, true beliefs through testimony is rooted in two, historically polarised, accounts whose origins can be traced back to the eighteenth century. The first of these, known as the non-reductionist, anti-reductionist, or (sometimes pejoratively) credulist account is historically associated with the Scottish philosopher, Thomas Reid (1710-96). The second, known as the reductionist account, is historically associated with another eighteenth century Scottish philosopher, David Hume, (1711-76). Broadly speaking, the non-reductionist (I will generally prefer that term) position maintains that we do not need additional positive reasons to accept the word of a testifier beyond the attestation itself, unless we have a specific reason to doubt her word. Thus, the non-reductionist account of justifying testimonial belief is *non-inferential*. Reductionism, on the other hand, comes in two forms. One is the traditional Humean reductionist position, known as global reductionism, which denies that testimony is a fundamental source of epistemic warrant. Consequently, it requires testimonially-based beliefs to be *inferentially* justified, *a posteriori*, by other sources, such as perception, memory, or inference. The principal problem identified in relation to global reductionism is that if *everything* we are told requires *a posteriori* corroboration, this clearly will materially restrict the number of things we can come to know. Obtaining the necessary corroboration may also be impracticable, or even impossible. Consequently, as Christopher Green notes, 'Few contemporary philosophers will endorse Hume's reductionist or inferentialist approach to testimonially-based belief in anything close to its full form' (Green, 2008:6). The more popular modern iteration of reductionism therefore is what is known as local reductionism, according to which the warrant or justification for any given testimonial utterance is arrived at primarily by monitoring the testifier in question for evidence of her sincerity and competence, or lack of it, with the help of such background evidence as may be available (Fricker, 1994: 398).

These are not the only accounts of belief justification espoused by contemporary epistemologists, however, and in Chapter 4 below I consider the arguments of proponents and critics of alternative accounts of belief justification. I also consider the view that all rule or criteria-based accounts of testimonial justification represent little more in practice than conceptual rules of thumb for a process of evaluation which is in reality largely determined by the social and individual context, or circumstances of each particular testimonial encounter.

2.4 The Epistemological Chasm

The epistemological divide between testifiers and recipients of catastrophe testimony though is not fundamentally methodological. It concerns the reality that catastrophe testimony is not only sourced in the memory of profoundly traumatic experiences, but that it is also exceptional in other ways, such as its descriptions of sensations and feelings which have no corresponding meaning to those who have not experienced them. When a testifier speaks of her fear, her hunger, her thirst or her pain in a place such as Auschwitz, she speaks of an experience which can neither be intellectually 'known', nor imagined. What Améry called 'a phenomenological study of the existence of the victim' was in reality no essayistic study of some esoteric philosophical concept but his deeply introspective examination and articulation of *his own* existence *as a* victim, and so it is for all survivor testimony. Henry Greenspan thus suggests, from a psychologist's perspective, that a common attribute of all forms of catastrophe testimony should be that it is 'authentic', in the sense of being believed to be true by the testifier, as opposed to being necessarily factually accurate (Greenspan and others, 2014). Kenneth Waltzer similarly notes that the term 'testimony' in such a context implies a *general affirmation of truth*, such as in the case of an affirmation made by those bearing witness in a judicial or religious context. Testimony, such as Holocaust testimony, he suggests, connotes 'truth value or sincerity of belief about truth, even if the testimonies in reality may be only rough approximations of truth' - selective, imprecise, chronologically dis-ordered, or reflecting limited comprehension of the wider context in which they took place, for example. Such testimonies, he adds should be seen as premised on the testifier's 'personal compact about truth'- her commitment to provide as accurate account as she can manage (ibid. :200). This implies in turn that the recipient of such testimony must *choose* whether to believe as true what she cannot know through a process of epistemological evaluation to be

true. The notion of an epistemological chasm between testifiers and recipients in relation to catastrophe testimony thus connotes both the methodological distance between epistemological accounts of belief justification and the acceptance of catastrophe testimony, and the more fundamental distance between the notion of truth as correspondence with factual accuracy and a more subjective and ethically driven notion of truth. This is a theme which I develop in later chapters of this dissertation, and particularly Chapters 5 to 7 (inclusive).

Testimony such as Holocaust testimony thus fundamentally disrupts the concept of testimony as wholly propositional and epistemically evaluable, and even challenges the assumption that the testifier's experiences may be communicable at all to the extent that they can describe the testifier's impressions, sensations or feelings.[3] Moreover, we cannot assume that the epistemically evaluable and non-epistemically evaluable elements of such testimony are necessarily discrete, or that the boundary between then is readily discernible. Consequently, it might be better to define at least some of the content of catastrophe testimony as *revelation* rather than *information.*

Finally, catastrophe testimony may be distinguished from other kinds of testimony by its narrativity, especially when it comes in the form of a survivor's autobiographical account of their life as a victim and survivor of the catastrophic experience in question. One can find numerous well-known examples of such narrativized 'life story' accounts in the testimony of survivors of the Third Reich. These come *inter alia*, in anecdotal, and sometimes novelesque, autobiographical forms such as Primo Levi's *If This Is A Man*, or Elie Wiesel's *Night*, in the form of fictionalised autobiographical accounts, such as Imre Kertesz's *Fatelessness* or *Kaddish For an Unborn Child*, or Jorge Semprun's *The Long Voyage*, or even in poetic form, as in the case of the testimony of Charlotte Delbo examined in Chapter 9 below, or the poems of Paul Celan. Narrativization does not necessarily reduce the value or reliability of such

[3] I present this as a separate argument from, and without prejudice to, the more general 'private language argument', after Wittgenstein, concerning the conceivability of a language known only to a speaker, ' in which a person could write down or give voice to his inner experiences—his feelings, moods, and so on---for his own use' (Wittgenstein,2009; para 243). My argument concerns specifically the less radical testimonial issue of communicability, and thus the possibility, or otherwise, of the transmission of information in terms understandable to a *hearer*.

accounts as conveyors of propositional information, but it can certainly make the task of evaluating them in that context harder.

2.5 Holocaust Testimony

Three of the four survivor experiences examined in Chapter 9 as case studies of the experience of being the victim and survivor of a collective atrocity are those of former Jewish prisoners of Auschwitz and other Nazi concentration camps. These were not victims of what many consider to be the greatest crime which occurred in Auschwitz, as well as the 'Reinhard' death camps – the mass murder on arrival by gassing of the vast majority of the Jewish prisoners who were not, as the survivors were, selected for slave labour. It was this crime which probably represents the apogee of the Holocaust in my view, both in terms of the numbers murdered and the industrial, dehumanized nature of their killing. Nevertheless, the treatment of Jewish prisoners though not of a different kind than that of other prisoners, certainly seems on the evidence of contemporary documents and the accounts of both former Jewish and non-Jewish prisoners, to have been considerably more brutal, and more likely to result in death, than that of other prisoners, and also distinctive in that the atrocities against Jewish prisoners were often committed by non-Jewish 'privileged' prisoners, as well as the SS guards. Thus it can be said to represent the apogee of the Jewish experience of persecution under the Third Reich. However both the mass murder of Jewish and other deportees, and the atrocities committed against Jewish and other prisoners constituted crimes which it later became socially impossible for the German people either to deny (because survivor testimony prevented denial, save in the case of a tiny minority of Holocaust deniers) or admit (because they were simply so great and so radically evil as to repudiate the humanity not only of those who committed them but also of those who allowed them to be committed). The task of testifying to their experience of Auschwitz for Jewish survivors, and also some non-Jewish survivors, thus represented testifying to experiences which were both at the limits of believability, and in many cases could not be believed. How, for example, does one explain, even to those who are willing to believe, the Monowitz-Buna satellite camp of Auschwitz - a rubber factory which never produced any rubber, and existed solely as a means of killing its own labour force in the most degrading and dehumanising manner that could be conceived, notwithstanding the real and desperately needed military and economic benefits of putting them to productive use?

The person sometimes cited as symbolising the ultimate Auschwitz victim is the *musselmann* ('moslem') - the prisoner whose humanity and will to live had been extinguished to the point where his fellow prisoners abandoned him to his fate. To me, however, it is the members of the *Sonderkommando* ('special labour detail'); Jewish prisoners, in the 'Reinhard' death camps and Auschwitz, living, like other prisoners, under a suspended but virtually inevitable death sentence, whose task it was to facilitate the processing of fellow Jews to the gas chambers, including deceiving them as to the real purpose of the 'showers' they were about to take, and to cremate their corpses. Conceiving and organising *Sonderkommando* squads, wrote Primo Levi, 'was National Socialism's most demonic crime' because it represented an attempt to shift the burden of guilt onto the victims, and thus deprive them 'of even the solace of innocence' (Levi, 1989; 52). Testifying to the experience of Auschwitz therefore represents a supreme challenge to bridging all three of the chasms which face catastrophe testimony: the epistemological chasm, the existential chasm and the moral chasm.

2.6 The Psychological Element

In the case of many kinds of testimony, the question of the testifier's state of mind is of little epistemic relevance. As Thomas Reid argued, we are inclined as human beings to believe what we are told, but that belief is also pragmatic - for instance in the case of mundane information, such as the time of day, or directions to a nearby location, or in a case where we know the testifier to be an expert in a field in which we have no or little knowledge or expertise. Questions of testifier motivation thus often arise only if recipients have reason to feel they are being deceived or misinformed by testifiers. Catastrophe testimony, on the other hand is frequently sourced in episodic memories of traumatic experiences which may have occurred many years, or even decades, earlier. Moreover, much may have happened in the intervening period which might have a direct bearing on what is recollected for the purpose of testifying. The testifier's memory may, for example, have become influenced by the psychotherapeutic treatment she has received related to her experiences, or by her exposure to intervening scientific insights into conditions such as post- traumatic stress disorder, or by historical or political accounts of the past she has seen or read. It may also be affected by her state of mind regarding the past at the time of testifying – whether, for example, she has been consoled or angered by some contemporary political or social initiative

relevant to the past. Consequently, understanding as much one can of the nature of the testifier's motivation, objectives, and state of mind, in testifying may well be an integral part of competently evaluating the accuracy, or reliability of her testimony.

By the same token, the recipient's evaluation of catastrophe testimony might similarly be affected by her own prior knowledge, or views, concerning the matters in question in the testimony and her own state of mind at the time of receiving it. Leaving aside recipients with an evident professional interest in its reception, the evaluation by recipients of the testimony may be affected by some general identity prejudice against or in favour of the testifier as a knower, for example on racial, gender, or other identity-based grounds, or some more personal bias, such as being a descendent of a victim, or of a perpetrator. Some recipients, like testifiers , may be very conflicted in this regard; those, for instance, who identify socially and culturally with perpetrators, yet are moved by the fate of their victims, and thus have a sense of duty to others to acknowledge and even memorialise what testifiers tell them, yet at the same time wish to put it behind them. Others may be primarily concerned with instrumentalising catastrophe testimony in the service of social or political theorising, and thus inclined to disregard or even deny the testifier's individuality. The importance of such motivational factors in the presentation and evaluation of catastrophe testimony can thus be crucial to its content and reception, and to the nature and extent of the resulting epistemological chasm, or at least what might *appear* to be an epistemological chasm, between testifier and recipient.

2.7 Summary

I have endeavoured in the preceding sections of this chapter to indicate some of the more important respects in which catastrophe testimony is or might be distinguishable from other kinds of testimony. Nevertheless, catastrophe testimony is certainly not thereby deprived of its importance or value as a source of propositional information, although the extent of it will depend on the form and content of the particular testimony. In the final analysis, the limit of epistemological enquiry has been set by epistemologists by reference to what can be justifiably believed, or come to be *known* by a recipient through testimony, and accordingly the existence and extent of the epistemological chasm is determined by the knowable content of any given testimonial utterance relative to its total content. With this in mind, I seek in the following two chapters to examine various classical and more recent methodologies for the

evaluation of testimony in general, and to consider them more specifically in relation to catastrophe testimony.

CHAPTER 3. HOW TESTIMONY CAN PRODUCE JUSTIFIED TRUE BELIEFS AND KNOWLEDGE

3.1 Introduction

The objective of this and the next chapter is not to offer a comprehensive review, or comparative critical analysis, of the many contemporary epistemological accounts of whether, and how, testimony yields, or produces, justified beliefs, or knowledge, but rather to offer a general overview, against a historical background, of the contemporary epistemic discourse regarding testimony, in the context of this dissertation. I begin by examining, in the following two sections, the two classic epistemological accounts of how we can justify our beliefs in testimonial utterances: *non-reductionism*, and *reductionism*, both in the form of *global reductionism*, and *local reductionism*.

3.2 The Non-Reductionist Account

3.2.1 The Historical Roots of Non-Reductionism

The historical roots of the contemporary non-reductionist account of testimonial justification (my preferred term for it) are to be found in a paper entitled *On Seeing*, one of a number of papers published by Thomas Reid in 1764 under the title *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*. In Chapter 6, Section XXIV of *Inquiry*, headed *Of The Analogy Between Perception And The Credit We Give To Human Testimony* (Reid 1983: pp.89-103), Reid expressed that analogy in the following terms:

> In the testimony of Nature given by the senses, as well as in the human testimony given by language, things are signified to us by signs: and in one as well as the other, the mind, either by original principles or by custom, passes from the sign to the conception and belief of the things signified (ibid.: 90).

The language of human testimony, Reid added comprises both 'natural' and 'artificial' language. The former embraces 'features of the face, gestures of the body, and modulations of the voice', which Nature gives us innate and universal skills as humans to interpret, analogous to the skills we have to interpret sense experience (ibid.). The latter consists in words uttered by the testifier, whose significance we must learn through experience, in tandem with learning our mother tongue, but also with the help of natural language (ibid.:91).

Reid then asked how we can rely on the conceptions and beliefs formed from our experiences of *past* testimonial utterences to ground our beliefs in *future* testimonial utterances. How, for example, can we assume that what was previously said with honest intention is not now being said with an intention to deceive, or mislead, or that words used in the past to express a certain thought are not now being used with a different meaning, or to express different thoughts? His answer was that:

> The wise and beneficent Author of Nature, who intended that we should be social creatures, and that we should receive the greatest and most important part of our knowledge by the information of others, hath, for these purposes, implanted in our natures two principles that tally with each other (ibid.: 93).

The first of these innate principles, said Reid, was *the principle of veracity*; 'a propensity to speak truth, and to use the signs of language so as to convey our real sentiments' (ibid.: 94). Even the greatest liars, he argued, speak the truth most of the time, because that is our dominant natural instinct, and we therefore do not lie unless the temptation to do so is strong enough to overcome that instinct. The second principle Reid identified was *the principle of credulity*; the disposition to believe what others tell us, which he claimed was unlimited in children (thus proving it was innate, rather than the product of reason or experience) but remained strong throughout adult life, even after encountering instances of deceit and falsehood. If these two principles had not been implanted in us, Reid argued, distrust and incredulity 'would deprive us of the greatest benefits of society, and place us in a worse condition than that of savages' (Reid 1983:95). Nevertheless, he added, our beliefs, once formed, were not immutable; they might be confirmed, or refuted, through reason or experience, including other testimony (ibid.:96-97).

3.2.2. Contemporary Non-Reductionist Accounts

All of the contemporary non-reductionist accounts of belief justification reviewed below owe much to Reid's earlier account. I begin with an important, and sustained, articulation and defence of non-reductionist principles found in C.A.J.Coady's book *Testimony: a Philosophical Study* (1992).

Coady essentially endorses Reid's principle of credulity, but reformulates it as a general *presumptive epistemic right* to believe, as a default position, the testimony of others. Coady

does not, though, go so far as to argue that this right should be unquestioning: 'This attitude of trust', he says 'is fundamental but it is not blind', citing Reid's observation that a child begins with an attitude of complete trust in what it is told, and develops more critical attitudes as it matures. 'None the less', he concludes, 'even for adults, the critical attitude is itself founded upon a general stance of trust, just as the adult awareness of the way memory plays us false rests upon a broader confidence in recollective powers.' (ibid.:46)[4] Moreover, says Coady, a presumption of trust should be *unreflective* rather than uncritical; one made as a default position, in the absence of 'signs of deceit, confusion or mistake' (ibid.:47). Thus qualified, the presumptive right to trust the word of others, says Coady, is fundamental to our acquisition of knowledge, as well as our learning language, since 'an extensive commitment to trusting the reports of others [is] a precondition of understanding their speech at all' (ibid.:176).

Coady's definition of 'natural testimony' (all testimony other than that given in judicial proceedings, where specific rules of evidence, such as the rule against hearsay, may apply), is not dissimilar to his definition of formal testimony. A speaker, S, he declares, testifies by making some statement that *p* only if: (1) that statement is both evidence that *p* and offered as evidence that *p*, (2) S has the 'relevant competence, authority, or credentials to state truly that *p*', and (3) S's statement is offered as evidence relevant to some 'disputed or unresolved question' and directed to those in need of such evidence. This insistence on the need for testimony to have what Coady calls 'evidential promise', has been challenged by Peter Graham (1997), who suggests firstly that this epistemic bar is simply too high for such mundane testimonial encounters as, for example, asking directions to the nearest post office, and secondly that by no means all testimony offered as evidence *is* evidence, notwithstanding the testifier's intention that it should be so. Accordingly, Graham argues, Coady's first condition should be modified by requiring a testimonial statement only to be *offered* as evidence (Graham, 1997: 227). I would add to this suggestion, my own doubt as to whether meeting Coady's second condition is practicable in many cases, such as in mundane testimony. In fact, I tend to agree with Elizabeth Fricker's (1995) critique that assuming the

[4] Coady offers no supporting evidence for the validity of the analogy between testimony and memory in this context, which seems to me questionable. I would say that the development of more critical attitudes to testimony is one which is empirically driven, and not necessarily uniform across all categories of testimony whereas the case of memory seems to me a more psychological process of coming to know , and trust, or distrust, one's own powers of memory.

testifier is 'someone-in-a-position-to-know-about-the-matter-in-question' implies a tendentious narrowing of the definition of what testimony is (Fricker, 1995: 396-7). Finally , I have some doubt as to whether Coady's third condition is a necessary or desirable supplement to his first condition in cases of non-formal testimony.

Tyler Burge makes another significant intervention on the non-reductionist side of the debate, in his essay 'Content Preservation' (1993). Burge endorses the views of Reid, regarding the grounds for our entitlement to believe testimony, but restates it in terms of what he calls the Acceptance Principle:

> A person is entitled to accept as true something that is presented as true and that is intelligible to him, unless there are stronger reasons not to do so (Burge 1993: 467).

Whilst acknowledging that such acceptance can be instinctive, Burge argues that an *entitlement* to accept what is *prima facie* intelligible to the testimonial recipient, as an epistemic default position, 'comes with being a rational agent' (ibid.467-8)[5]. Echoing Coady's stance that testimony is a direct epistemic source of knowledge, Burge maintains that the entitlement to accept is an epistemic right or warrant, equivalent to the entitlement to rely on other seemingly rational epistemic 'guides to truth', such as perception, memory, or deductive or inductive reasoning (ibid. :458 and 470-71). It is, he declares, 'cognitively fundamental' to our existence as rational beings, in order that we may learn language, and acquire beliefs from others, without the ability to do which 'our cognitive lives would be little different from the animals' (ibid.466). The same rationality underpins our entitlement to rely *unquestioningly* on certain kinds of testimony, such as mundane testimony, signs we read, newspaper reports, or statements made by strangers on 'unloaded topics'. The basic rule is that: 'We are a priori prima facie entitled to accept something that is prima facie intelligible and presented as true' (472).[6]

[5] Matthew Weiner defines such default justification as 'a justification for a belief that does not depend on other beliefs based ultimately on the believer's past or current experiences'. The point he makes is that such other beliefs provide justification over and above default justification in the form of positive evidence for the proposition in question (Weiner 2003:257).

[6] According to Burge, the difference between entitlement and justification is that the former is an epistemic right or warrant 'that need not be understood by or even accessible to the subject', whereas the latter 'must be available to the cognitive repertoire of the subject', though he admits that the border between the two 'may be fuzzy' (458-9).

This entitlement, Burge accepts, is no guarantee of the actual truth of the testimonial proposition in question. The Acceptance Principle, like Coady's presumptive right, simply establishes a rational, but defeasible, epistemic default position, which Burge justifies on the grounds that to *presume,* in the absence of contrary evidence, that a testifier who presents as true a proposition which is prima facie intelligible is, or may be, actually lying, is a 'rationally unnatural attitude' (476).

Burge's Acceptance Principle, then, represents an attractively permissive restatement of Reid's account, but I am somewhat troubled by the condition of intelligibility in the context of catastrophe testimony. What does intelligibility mean for example when applied to testimony in which the testifier reveals his subjective experience of being tortured to someone who has never herself been tortured? How does the hearer being 'rational' help him to understand such an experience? Perhaps Burge had this problem in mind when he elaborated in his essay 'Interlocution, Perception, and Memory' (1997) on his notion of entitlement ,by separating it into two 'rational default positions':

1. We have a general *a priori prima facie (pro tanto)* entitlement to rely on seeming understanding as general understanding; and
2. We have a general *a priori prima facie (pro tanto)* entitlement to believe putative assertions that we seem to understand (Burge 1997:21)

This reformulation, however, seems not to settle the issued I have raised. In fact it probably makes it more difficult to surmount, since it now appears to involve a hearer subjectively speculating about a testifier's subjective description of an experience which lies beyond the hearer's lived experience.

Arguments For Non-Reductionism

The most commonly cited arguments in support of the non-reductionist account of belief justification and knowledge acquisition are, in summary:

1. Many, if not most, of the beliefs, and knowledge, that we acquire are in fact acquired testimonially, through applying (whether consciously or not) the principle of credulity, This includes specifically those beliefs and knowledge we acquire throughout childhood and adolescence, from our teachers, and our parents, concerning the world, such as our knowledge

of language, history, geography, or science. Equally, in our adult lives, even though we might adopt, through experience, and the development of our rational faculties, a less unconditionally accepting attitude to testimonial assertions, we continue to learn many things by accepting the word of those whose knowledge of specific subjects exceeds our own. Thus, if we have no right to take others at their word, as Reid's principle of veracity encourages to do, then the vast majority of the things we believe cannot be regarded as things we know, and this seems deeply implausible. This seems to me to be the most powerful argument.

2. We can only learn to speak the language of social discourse if we take others at their word; that is assume that what they say, or convey to us by signs or gestures is what they intend to say, or convey. I find this less convincing. If someone tells me that the object in front of me is a lemon, and the next person that it is a lime, then I cannot know what it is by trusting both of them. If one person tells me it is a lemon, but three people tell me it is a lime, I can decide that the word of three is more trustworthy than the word of one, but then my decision is a reductive one.

3. It is more rational to believe that those who tell us things are telling the truth, than that they are lying. Reid said any form of lying is 'doing violence to our nature', and thus not employed unless the temptation to do so is stronger than the natural instinct not to do so (Reid 1983: 94). Burge (1993) argues that lying is a form of madness, since the purpose of reason is to promote truth. This may be generally true, but lying can also be rational, for example as a pretext for persuading someone to take beneficial medicine they are irrationally opposed to taking.

Arguments Against Non-Reductionism

The most commonly cited arguments against the non-reductionist account of belief justification are:

1. That, as Elizabeth Fricker puts it, to assert, as a normative epistemic principle, 'that a hearer has the epistemic right to believe what she observes an arbitrary speaker to assert, just on the ground that it has been asserted' is to write an 'epistemic charter for the gullible and undiscriminating' (Fricker, 1994: 126-7). This must be at least partly true, for there are times when we *should* be sceptical, or discriminating, about what we are told - about a salesman's assertion concerning the merits of his products, or the demerits of those of his competitors, for example - but it is incorrect to suggest that non-reductionism, of itself, *promotes, or produces,* gullibility. On the contrary, non-reductionism specifically provides that belief in the word of others is a default position which one is only entitled to maintain in the *absence* of contrary evidence. Gullibility, on the other hand, is a propensity that *some* humans have to be easily persuaded to believe what others tell them, when others would not do so. Gullible people therefore believe the word of others more readily because it is their nature to do so, not because they are licensed to do so by epistemic rules. Moreover, for Fricker to warn against hearers who are gullible and undiscriminating seems somewhat at odds with her own local reductionist reliance on their monitoring abilities (see below).

2. James Van Cleve (2006) argues that when Reid enunciated his principles of veracity he intended to say no more than that '(It tends to be the case that) if A says that p, A believes that p', since he contrasted the propensity to speak the truth with lying, which is asserting as true what you what you believe to be *false* (Van Cleve 2006: 51). Consequently, when A testifies that p to B, and B, following the principle of credulity, accepts that p, the result is no more than that both A and B *come to believe* that p. Reid, says Van Cleve, never intended to suggest that a belief acquired on this basis must be justified, or knowledge creating *per se* (ibid.:59). Reid, he says, considered (contra Hume) that the *epistemic* question was settled differently, by accepting that testimony was an epistemically basic source of *evident* belief, or knowledge, like perception. Thus Reid's principles of veracity and credulity can be accepted by reductionists as an account of the *psychology* of testimony, whilst at the same time rejecting them as support for the

non-reductive epistemic account of testimony as an epistemically *basic* source of justified belief, or knowledge, like perception.

3. Jennifer Lackey argues that, in the absence of any specific evidence available to her against accepting the speaker's report, non-reductionism leaves the hearer with 'no positive epistemic work to do in order to justifiedly (sic). accept the testimony in question' (Lackey, 2006: 166). It does not require the hearer, in the absence of clear evidence of the speaker's insincerity or unreliability, to make any positive effort to ensure that his acceptance of the speaker's testimony as true is rationally founded (ibid. :170). Thus, she claims, non-reductionism is false. As in the case of Fricker's claim of gullibility, however, this seems to take the argument too far; non-reductionism doesn't *entail* indifference to the task of scrutinising testifiers, though it might, as she suggests be claimed by the indifferent to licence it.

Peter Lipton (1998) notes, in similar vein, that Coady rarely addresses the question of how we actually discriminate in practice between the testimony we accept and the testimony we reject, suggesting that he might have 'downplayed these issues for fear of giving false comfort to the reductionists' (Lipton, 1998:23).

3.3 The Reductionist Account

3.3.1 The Historical Roots of Reductionism

The historical roots of contemporary reductionist accounts of testimonial justification are to be found in an essay written by David Hume entitled 'Of Miracles', which comprises Section X of *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding,* originally published in 1748. Though the essay, as its title implies, is mainly concerned with the warrant for accepting testimonial accounts of miracles, it is generally taken by commentators as having far wider significance in the context of the Humean evaluation of testimony more generally.

Having acknowledged that 'there is no species of reasoning more common, more useful, and even necessary to human life, than that which is derived from the testimony of men, and the reports of eye-witnesses and spectators', Hume suggests that our acceptance of the veracity of testimonial assertions is derived empirically, from 'our observation of the veracity of

human testimony, and of the usual conformity of facts to the reports of witnesses' (Hume 2007: 80-81). Humean testimony must therefore conform to the general maxim that 'no objects have any discoverable connexion together, and that all the inferences which we can draw from one to another, are founded merely on our experience of their constant and regular conjunction'(ibid. :82). Thus, contra Reid's *principle of credulity,* Hume believed that any general propensity individuals might have to believe what others tell us them could only be properly acquired, epistemically speaking, *inductively* (ibid.). Consequently, the justification of our beliefs in testimony in general 'reduces' to an *a posteriori* acceptance of the veracity of those epistemic sources on which the testimony in question rests, such as perception, or memory. This thesis is known as 'global reductionism'.

The basic objection to Hume's global reductionist thesis is that it simply does not accord with the reality of how we come to acquire justified beliefs, and to know about the world around us. Coady, for example, declares:

> many of us have never seen a baby born, nor have most of us examined the circulation of the blood nor the actual geography of the world nor any fair sample of the laws of the land, nor have we made the observations that lie behind our knowledge that the lights in the sky are heavenly bodies immensely distant, to mention some of the many things we generally consider ourselves to justifiably believe; they are beliefs formed not through our own observations, or experiences, but on the say-so of others' (Coady 1992:82).

Thus, for example, the acquisition of knowledge in childhood from parents or teachers is often cited as a rebuttal of global reductionism. Other empirical challenges raised by Coady and others to Hume's formulation, notably include: (1) that in order to acquire the necessary linguistic skills and tools to understand testimony at all, it is surely necessary to form beliefs by accepting the say-so of others, and (2) the notion that reliance on testimony must be empirically based invites circularity, since that empirical basis may well in its turn be reliant on other testimony.

Jennifer Lackey also questions the possibility of empirically determining the general reliability of testimony She points out the vast range of beliefs which can come to be known through testimony, from those beliefs whose reliability is generally high, such as reports about the time of day, or what one had for breakfast, to those whose reliability is generally questionable, such as testimony concerning the achievements of one's children, the looks of a loved one, or a politician's testimony concerning the character of their political opponents (her examples!). Consequently, she claims, it is doubtful whether 'it even makes sense to talk about testimony being a *generally reliable source*.' (Lackey 2006: 162). Moreover, she argues, even if it *could* be demonstrated, taking all types and instances of testimony and testifiers into account, that testimony was *generally* reliable, that information would have very little epistemic bearing on evaluating any *particular* instance of testimony.

In practice not only non-reductionists but also modern reductionist commentators reject global reductionism.The latter, instead, largely support the account of reductionism known as *local reductionism.*

3.3.2 Contemporary Reductionist Accounts

Elizabeth Fricker, in her essay 'Against Gullibility' (1994), offered what seems to be the leading account of local reductionism. After accepting that the prospects for global reductionism were 'hopeless', she argued that the epistemically responsible hearer should instead seek to assess the trustworthiness of testimony *locally*; that is on a case-by-case basis, by monitoring the testifier in question for sincerity (belief in the truth of her testimonial utterance) and competence with respect to the propositional content of her utterance. Such an appraisal, she suggested, would comprise 'an ascription of beliefs, desires, and other mental states and character traits', employing 'commonsense psychology or person-theory', in an epistemic context, in order 'to explain her utterance: to render it comprehensible why she made that assertion, on that occasion'. (Fricker,1994:148-9). The appraisal should also take into account any relevant background evidence of sincerity or reliability. A finding in favour of the testifier on both grounds would show her to

be trustworthy The required degree of monitoring in each case would be that which is sufficient to enable the hearer to defend any decision to accept or reject the speaker's word (ibid.:150-151).[7]

In her later essay, 'Critical Notice', (1995), Fricker conceded that Coady's non-reductive notion of a presumptive right to believe what one is told should be accepted in relation to the acquisition of knowledge in the 'developmental phase' of life, though not in respect of the adult stages of life. However, she argued, there was no need otherwise to seek to establish any norms regarding the *general* reliability of testimony in order to evaluate particular instances of testimonially-based belief, if one embraced instead the concept of local reduction formulated in her earlier essay. One could, for instance still take into account any evidence of a particular speaker's past record of trustworthiness as a testifier, insofar as relevant to the subject matter of her present testimonial statement, as background evidence in favour of its acceptance. (Fricker, 1995:404).

The Argument For Local Reductionism

The best argument for local reductionism (or at least Fricker's iteration of it), for those, like myself, who espouse a pragmatic, context-driven, view of testimonial evaluation, is its insistence that each instance of testimony must be assessed individually, on its particular epistemic merits. It reflects the reality that a hearer's evaluation of the trustworthiness of a testifier can be a subjective, or instinctive, as well as a rational process, and may depend on a number of interactive factors, such as context, situation, and the respective personalities and interests of the parties. Fricker herself freely admits to having 'wildly volatile' intuitions, as a hearer, from testimonial situations, from a strong inclination to trust the word of a speaker to a deeply sceptical response to her testimony. Since testimony is not a unitary category, she argues, it neither requires, nor fits, a universal default position, whether of trust, or scepticism, towards the testifier (Fricker, 1995: 406-7).

The Arguments Against Local Reductionism

[7] Many commentators assume that testimonial utterances are oral, or predominately oral, and thus commonly refer to testifiers and recipients of testimonial utterances as, respectively, speakers or hearers. I will therefore use these terms where employed by the relevant commentator.

A number of objections have been recorded to the local reductionist thesis. I list some of these below:

1. Its limited scope. Not only does it assume that testimonial encounters are face-to face- events in which the testifier's words and gestures can be interpreted by the hearer, but its scope, is further reduced by two important carve-outs Fricker has accepted from her general thesis. The first of these is beliefs acquired during the early 'developmental phase' of life, and the second covers matters 'which common sense psychological knowledge licenses one to expect the speaker to be competent about' (Fricker, 1995: 405). There may be others, though; how, for example, does one evaluate testimony delivered by someone whose words, features, or gestures were wholly or partly obscured, say by some article of apparel, or whose medical condition requires his speech to be delivered by an artificial voice. Further, and even more importantly, suggests Matthew Weiner (2003), Fricker's disclaimer of the need to find grounds for the *general* reliability of testimony means that local reductionism cannot justify beliefs which the testimonial recipient cannot confirm at first hand. These would include beliefs about the past, about places we have never visited, and most scientific and mathematical laws and theories, all of which depend on the notion of our being able to accept what we are told, unless there is positive evidence against doing so (Weiner 2003:257).

2. Local reductionism has no mechanism for dealing with cases of the absence or inadequacy of the requisite evaluatory skills on the part of the hearer, or the presence of epistemic vices in her character such as an identity-based prejudice against the speaker.

3. The absence of a declared starting default position either of acceptance of testimony as true or rejection of testimony as false makes for unecessary practical difficulties. Michaelian (2012) argues it amounts to a 'default monitoring' policy, which offers a far less attractive cost-benefit ratio for the formation of justified beliefs, and the acquisition of knowledge, than the default acceptance policy of non-reductionism. In reality, he argues, monitoring usually means monitoring for

dishonesty, since competence is more likely to be assumed and more difficult to disprove than honesty, especially in a one-off face-to-face encounter. Further, he argues, deception detection is in practice 'cue based'—based on cues offered by the speaker's words or gestures- rather than 'knowledge based'-based on prior background knowledge, such as knowledge of the speaker's testimonial record. Default monitoring as a general practice is thus only justified on the assumptions that dishonest testimony is frequent, that reliable cues to dishonesty exist, and that hearers can and do in practice effectively monitor speakers for dishonesty. However, he claims, empirical studies of monitoring suggest either that these assumptions are untrue, or at best that the evidence in support of them is weak. In fact, he says, they tend to indicate that agents have a built-in tendency to evaluate testimony as honest. Consequently, he concludes, default acceptance of the speaker's word, which limits monitoring to cases where the hearer has positive reasons to doubt it , is both a more efficient means of acquiring knowledge, and one which results in the formation of more justified beliefs .

4. Alternatively to the argument in the preceding paragraph, local reductionism does not really offer an epistemic account of testimonial justification, but more an epistemically worked through description of a perceptual and psychological process of evaluating a testifier and her testimony which occurs, more or less instinctively, in the course of any face-to face oral testimonial encounter. In other words, local reductionism does not have its own epistemic foundations.

3.4 Justification as an Interpersonal Process: The Assurance View

Both non-reductionist and local reductionist accounts of the justification of our belief in testimony , *contra* global reductionism, appear to accept that it is the trustworthiness, or at least plausibility, of the testifier, as opposed to the content of her testimony, which principally determines in practice whether her testimony should be accepted or not. Catastrophe testimony, such as Holocaust testimony, I would argue, weights that balance particularly heavily in favour of belief in the testifier, not only because it concerns experiences, or events, which lie beyond the realms of the testimonial addressee's lived experience, rational contemplation, or even imagining, but also because the strong (though not necessarily

indefeasible) moral authority typically vested in the testifier as a victim and survivor of a catastrophic experience militates against not taking him or her at their word.[8]

The Assurance View (AV) of testimonial justification therefore should, on the face of it, be of particular interest in relation to catastrophe testimony, since it seems to go even further than both reductionist and non-reductionist accounts in this respect, by putting trust in the speaker at the heart of the testimonial encounter. A successful testimonial transmission, says Richard Moran, a leading proponent, of AV, requires a hearer first and foremost to believe in the testifier; belief in the testimonial proposition, he claims, *follows* (comes out of) belief in the speaker (Moran 2006: 273).[9] The speaker invites the hearer to believe her testimonial proposition, by presenting *herself* as the reason for believing her testimony, and making herself personally accountable for its truth. The hearer, in his turn, in accepting the speaker's testimonial assertion as true, accepts the speaker's invitation to trust her, by placing reliance on her word. This, says Moran is what is meant by *telling someone something*, as opposed to *letting them know* something, the latter being no more than an invitation to the hearer to 'see for himself' the evidential belief-worthiness of the testimonial proposition.

The testimonial exchange envisioned by AV thus creates a kind of quasi-contractual relationship between the speaker and hearer (providing the hearer accepts the speaker's invitation to believe her, which of course he may not do). Consequently, for example, it would seem that no such contract would hold if the hearer comes to believe what the speaker has told him through other means than by relying on her word, for example through other evidence, or because, having disbelieved her, he later comes to believe the same proposition as a result of accepting the restatement of it by another testifier. Similarly, it seems that no such contract could come into being between the speaker and someone who overhears her telling someone else something, even if the overhearer comes to believe it directly as a result of that overhearing.

[8] I am assuming, of course that the addressee is not herself a fellow survivor, or did not participate or witness the events or experiences which form the subject matter of the testimony.

[9] Once again, this thesis assumes that testimony is a speech act between a single speaker and a single hearer, so I will adopt the speaker/hearer terminology Moran employs.

Lackey (2011), though, sees the central dilemma of AV as a disconnect between its concept of an invitation to trust the speaker and *truth itself*. AV has no mechanism, she argues, for correcting a situation in which a speaker regularly makes sincere, but untrue, because mistaken, assertions. On the other hand, she argues, rectifying that problem by adding conditionality, for example by requiring the speaker's testimony to serve as a reliable guide to the truth, would mean derogating from the concept of founding testimonial justification on the speaker's interpersonal assurance, or guarantee, of truthfulness, which is at the heart of AV, and possibly even rendering the speaker's assurance 'epistemically superfluous'.

Lackey's point is, I believe, well made. Sincerity, according to AV, seems to necessarily imply reliability, by in effect taking Reid's principle of credulity beyond that of an *a priori*, or default position, into an ongoing normative presumption of trust. If that presumption is rebuttable, then AV is non-reductionism differently expressed; if it is non-rebuttable then AV amounts to a declaration of faith, and has no epistemic character. Moreover, I would question how many cases of conveying propositional information can actually be deemed to include an implied invitation by the teller to believe her, or implied accountability for the truth of what she says. It is, yet again, a matter of context: if I tell someone the time of day, or give him directions to the nearest post office, for example, it is highly unlikely that I would care very much whether she believed me or not. And again, if I pass on information gleaned from an authoritative source, such as that Paris is the capital of France, I am simply stating what I believe to be a fact, which does not need my personal endorsement. Ultimately, therefore , I have difficulty in distinguishing AV from non-reductionism.

3.5 Beyond Reductionism and Non-Reductionism

The accounts of belief justification examined above offer different approaches to the issue of how beliefs in the propositional content of testimony may be evaluated and justified from an epistemological perspective, but they do so from a perspective which is based on three common assumptions:

1. That testimony is predominantly presented in the form of a spoken utterance directed by a single speaker to a hearer, or perhaps a limited group of hearers, in her presence.

2.That it is possible to prescribe normative rules or criteria for the evaluation of all kinds of testimony, with certain specific exceptions.

3. That the justification of testimonial beliefs as true is, unless specifically stated otherwise, a matter of rational assessment requiring no specialist assessment skills or experience.

The difficulties in applying the criteria or rules of evaluation prescribed in the above accounts largely result from the disconnect between these normative conceptual assumptions and reality. Moreover, even where the existence of this disconnect has been recognized the 'solution' often seems to involve treating acknowledged exceptions to the rules in the same prescriptive manner as the rules themselves. Take, for example, the exception made for 'development phase' knowledge acquired in childhood from parents or other authority figures. This involves assuming that children routinely accept all propositional statements from such sources as fact, but as many parents and teachers can confirm, factors such as the age, the intellectual quality and personality, of the child, and the personality, competence, or authority of the parent or teacher, as well as the nature of the information conveyed, can all affect the child's willingness to accept what she is told as true. Moreover, her judgment might well be influenced, in the age of social media, by other sources of information the child might access, and might, whether rightly or wrongly, deem authoritative. In addition, none of the accounts reviewed in this Chapter give serious consideration to the fact that hearers sometimes bring to their evaluation of testimony pre-existing epistemic preferences, or prejudices, such as those of a racial or gendered nature, which might influence in some way or other their evaluation of the testifier's sincerity or competence.

Attempts to fix these problems conceptually may themselves fall foul of similar problems. Jennifer Lackey (2006 (b)), for instance, suggests resolving the reductionist/non-reductionist dichotomy by adopting a 'Dualist' approach to evaluation

which incorporates *both* to the need for the speaker's testimony to be 'reliable or otherwise truth-conducive' and to the need for the hearer to have 'appropriate positive reasons' for accepting the speaker's testimony based on the *content* of that testimony. (Lackey, 2006(b):170). This approach, she argues, would move the epistemic debate on both from the reductionist notion that testimony is purely transmissive, which, she claims, gives testimony far too *little* epistemic credit, and the non-reductionist notion that testimony is a basic epistemic source, like perception, memory, or inference, which, she claims, gives testimony far too *much* epistemic credit. However, whilst Lackey's analysis of the problem she is trying to fix seems sound, her proposal for fixing it seeks to apply another set of normative criteria to a vast range of epistemic events which are not, in her words, 'of a kind'. In other words, we are back, epistemically speaking, to square one.

Consequently, I am more sympathetic to the view of Martin Kusch (2002) that prescriptive or normative accounts such as Coady's non-reductionist and Fricker's local reductionist accounts 'are guilty of what one might call a "psychologistic reification" of a social practice'; that is one which is, in reality , determined by the social setting of the testimonial event (Kusch 2002: 339). He argues that it is communities rather than individuals who are the primary bearers of knowledge, and thus how we approach the question of justification largely depends on how we perceive that task in the social context in which we are required to address it Consequently, whatever may be the norms of epistemic evaluation to which we theoretically subscribe, we end up treating them as basic rules, to be relaxed or tightened , according to the social realities of each specific testimonial encounter (ibid. :340).

I support Kusch's general conclusion, and as we will discover it has particular relevance to catastrophe testimony. I would like, however, to add a rider that it is not necessarily *only* social contexts which may cause us to relax or tighten the rules of testimonial evaluation; individual circumstances, attitudes, values, and prior empirical experiences, also come into it. I would also add (and will more fully discuss later) from the perspective of catastrophe testimony, that the social context in which the testimony of survivors of catastrophic experiences is evaluated is not necessarily benign. Apart from the general issue of epistemically directed prejudice, such as racial or gender prejudice, the hearer may be influenced by a socially determined desire to deny, or distort, the truth of such testimony, as

was evident in the case of some domestic post-war trials, both in West Germany and some formerly Nazi- occupied territories, of those accused of war crimes after the Second World War. Thus, whilst I agree that treating evaluatory rules as rules of thumb accords more closely with the reality of testimonial evaluation, I am not thereby arguing that the outcome of doing so will be necessarily more beneficial or desirable.

3.6 Summary

Reviewing the accounts of belief justification discussed in this Chapter from the perspective of catastrophe testimony thus reveals some of the disconnects between that testimony and the kinds of testimony which those accounts largely seem to address. The most serious practical gap is probably that between the conception of testimony as an assertoric speech act and the reality of how catastrophe testimony is produced. The testimony of Holocaust survivors is an obvious example, since it is overwhelmingly found today in the form of written texts, audio or video recordings, often mediated by an interlocutor, or in autobiographical accounts by survivors of their experiences addressed to the world at large, including works of autobiographical fiction.[10]

In fact, the idea of testimony as necessarily a matter of arms-length in-person evaluation of the statements of speakers has long been questioned. One widely accepted exception already discussed is the beliefs we acquire in childhood. Wittgenstein for instance, declared that much of what we learn as children we simply accept as *facts*. (Wittgenstein, 1975: para.159). 'The child learns by believing the adult', he notes; 'Doubt comes after belief' (ibid.: 160). His point is that these testimonial beliefs acquired unquestioningly during childhood constitute a necessary foundation for the development of later epistemological attributes of doubting and questioning. Accepting the epistemic authority of others more or less automatically, however, is not only characteristic of knowledge acquisition in childhood. We continue to believe things on the presumed testimonial authority of others throughout our adult lives, whether transmitted face-to -face, or heard or seen in other ways, or by reading various texts. As Wittgenstein also observes: 'I believe what people transmit to me in a certain manner. In this way I believe geographical, chemical, historical facts etc. That is how

[10] Indeed it is sometimes impossible to know where autobiography ends, and fiction begins. See for example the works of Imre Kertesz, such as *Fatelessness*, *Kaddish for an Unborn Child*, *Liquidation*, and *Fiasco*, or in the case of a non-Jewish victim of the Third Reich, Jorge Semprun's *The Long Voyage.*

I *learn* the sciences' (ibid.: para. 175). In fact, some of the everyday knowledge we acquire through testimony is not even acquired *reflectively*, particularly where little of consequence is at stake in accepting the testifier's word. It is essentially a matter of context; I may for example follow a stranger's directions to the nearest post office more or less unreflectively, if I merely wish to purchase some stamps for general use , but be deeply concerned about the reliability of his information if I am wanting to post an important letter as expeditiously as possible.

Nigel Pleasants suggests, following Wittgenstein, that the process of building beliefs is one in which beliefs may be initially acquired via an empirically unverified 'culturally transmitted world picture', which, if they are not subsequently defeated, may in time lead to an empirically or inductively based more general presumption of trust in testimony of particular categories (Pleasants, 2018: 20). Another way of expressing this might be that the difference between childhood or early stage learning and adult or mature learning is essentially one which relates to the size and nature of the cultural 'world' in which information is transmitted through testimony. In childhood, that world may be, environmentally and empirically speaking, comparatively tiny, but as the child grows, so does its world, spatially, temporally, relationally and empirically. Such growth, though, is not necessarily uniform; I may come to learn more and more about, say language, or mathematical theory, but comparatively little more concerning, say, the history of North America, or the rules of chess. I may also come to know things by disproving things I previously thought I knew.

Accepting, though, that there are many cases in which the testimonial recipient will be required, or will want, to find a positive reason to believe the word of his informant, rather than taking it at face value, non-reductionism and local reductionism appear to offer distinctly different ways of going about the process of evaluation. The former offers a starting or default position of defeasible acceptance of the testifier's word. The latter does not appear to have a starting position at all, and indeed the notion that every testimonial statement which is not accepted more or less unreflectively should be critically monitored for sincerity and competence implies that there should not be one. On that basis a starting position of default acceptance seems to be more epistemically beneficial and realistic, but I am far from convinced that there is any practical significance in this debate. As Fricker points out, a hearer's feelings of trust or doubt in the speaker's word may change, or even fluctuate,

sometimes rapidly, or wildly, in the course of a testimonial encounter. An *a priori* presumption of trust in a testifier may be defeated in seconds, but so might a resolve to critically interrogate her testimony for evidence of insincerity, or unreliability. Once again, it is a matter of context.

Finally, when it comes to applying non-reductionist and reductionist methodologies to trauma testimony in general, and catastrophe testimony in particular, a further question arises as to what extent it can be assumed that such testimony is rationally evaluable by its recipient. Assuming accounts of personal traumatic experiences to be intelligible, or even communicable, may be epistemically and psychologically unwarranted, even where their language appears familiar to the recipient. Jean Améry, for instance, said that the only way he could *really* communicate the experience of being tortured to another person would be to similarly torture them, but even that were possible how would I, say, be able to relate *my* sensory and psychological experience of being tortured by him to *his* experience of being tortured by the SS?

There are, however, other accounts of belief justification which their proponents claim offer better epistemological insights than non-reductionism, or reductionism. In the following Chapter, I investigate that claim specifically from the standpoint of catastrophe testimony, asking whether any of these accounts might better serve the task of evaluating catastrophe testimony.

CHAPTER 4. OTHER ACCOUNTS OF BELIEF JUSTIFICATION

4.1 Inference to the Best Explanation

Inference to the Best Explanation (IBE) is principally used in relation to the justification of scientific hypotheses. As Duncan Pritchard notes, IBE employs a form of inductive reasoning known as abductive reasoning, which 'does not make appeal to a large and representative set of observations. Instead, it simply proceeds from a single observed phenomenon to the best explanation of that phenomenon' (Pritchard,2014:195). In other words, abduction, like induction, but in contrast to deduction, is *ampliative* (its conclusions go beyond what is logically entailed by its premises), but whereas induction appeals to a body of observed frequencies, or statistics, to justify its inferential conclusions, abduction appeals to explanatory considerations (which may or may not include such frequencies or statistics) to do so. Moreover, the hearer's warrant to infer the best explanation in this way is defeasible, if some better explanation is subsequently indicated by other evidence (Douven, 2017: 4).

IBE is most frequently cited in the context of scientific methodology in the form of the argument that the best of all possible explanations for the apparent predictive success of our most successful and longstanding scientific theories or hypotheses is that they are either true, approximately true, or highly likely to be true, since it would be 'miraculous' if the hypothesis in question were to be false, yet at the same time consistently predictively successful. Hence this argument is sometimes called the 'no-miracle' argument[11]. This, in turn, claims Peter Lipton, one of its principal proponents, implies that IBE is 'truth-tropic', since it is the inferential method which led us to establishing the truthfulness of these theories, or hypotheses (Lipton, 2004:191). An adaptation of IBE suggested by Jonathan Adler as a means of justifying testimonial utterances is that: ' [t]he best explanation for why the informant asserts that P is normally that….he believes it for responsible reasons and…..intends that I shall believe it too'. (Adler, 1994: 274f, cited at Douven, 2017 : 4).

The obvious question, therefore, is: How is IBE different from a non-reductionist entitlement to trust the testifier? Lipton argues that IBE's inferential account is more valid than Coady's non-inferential presumptive trust thesis, because our testimonial beliefs are

[11] For a detailed analysis of the IBE methodology see, for example, Finke, 2011: Chapter 2.

generally more inferential than Coady's non-reductionist account allows. They are, he argues, cognitively integrated with all our stored beliefs from other epistemic sources, and our experience of evaluating them, and it is this coherence of beliefs and practices which we bring to our evaluation of a particular testimonial statement. Thus, for example, even where we may appear to accept information, say, about the price of a return rail ticket to Sheffield, at face value, our acceptance is in reality made against a background of experience of the price of rail tickets generally. Consequently, Lipton claims, an inferential process, such as IBE is a more accurate representation of the process of selecting those testimonial beliefs we accept, than an *a priori* presumption of trust. On the other hand, Lipton argues, IBE also constitutes a general account of inductive reasoning which does not require a presumption that inferences from testimony need to be reduced to inferences from 'testimony-free premises'' (Lipton, 1998: 24). Rather, IBE permits a 'default-trigger' notion of testimony, in which a default situation of accepting what we are told 'may be overridden by a trigger that switches us into inferential mode' (ibid. : 26). Thus, Lipton argues, his IBE account also differs from local reductionism in offering as a starting position the truth of the speaker's assertion as the best explanation of why she said it, whilst conceding the need to actively assess the speaker's testimonial performance and to take into account the 'essential role of background belief' (ibid. :30).

Axel Gelfert makes similar claims on behalf of IBE. He argues that as an account of testimonial justification which adopts neither an *a priori* position of trust/acceptability in testimony ('trusted acceptance') nor one which presupposes the need to monitor testimony counterfactually ('rational rejection') it can embrace both positions, according to the context of the testimonial encounter. Thus, he claims, we can employ IBE to identify *both* instances of testimony which should be accepted, and those which should be rejected in a non-antagonistic manner (Gelfert, 2010: 394-395)

Strenuous conceptual and practical objections to IBE as a justificatory methodology, however, have been raised by those such as Bas van Fraassen who hold the 'scientific anti-realist' view that science aims at the truth of the observable world but not the unobservable world (van Fraassen, 1980, 1983, 1985,1989). Two of these objections, which seem to me particularly difficult for proponents of IBE are:

1. Its circularity. The success of a particular hypothesis, theory, or account, is said to be best explained by the fact that it is true (approximately true, highly likely to be true) which is claimed, in turn, to validate the success of IBE as a reliable epistemic yardstick. In other words, the explanation validates the hypothesis which in turn validates the explanation. Lipton (2000) accepts this inevitable circularity, but deems it 'benign'. It is, he contends, typical of the 'self-evidencing' explanations commonly found in science, in which hypotheses are supported by the very observations they are supposed to explain, and the observations, in their turn, support the hypothesis precisely because it would explain them. He cites by way of example Darwin's theory of natural selection. However valid this defence may be in relation to IBE as a process for evaluating a data-driven scientific hypotheses, however, it must be questionable how far it applies to the evaluation of a testimonial belief, and particularly one which, as in the case of catastrophe testimony, relies on a subjectively produced mental image of a past event. Consequently the issue of circularity raises valid questions in relation to the efficacy of IBE as a reliable epistemic means of belief justification in the context of testimony.

2. The other crucial objection to IBE is that it offers no clear idea of what we mean by the term 'best explanation', or what criteria we can apply in selecting from any given pool of candidate explanations the one that we deem to be the best explanation.[12] Lipton (2000, 2004) responds that the 'best' explanation should mean not the *likeliest* explanation---the one which appears most probable--- but the *'loveliest'* explanation---the explanation that would, if correct, provide the greatest degree of understanding. Lipton identifies scope, precision, mechanism, unification, and simplicity, in this context, as measures of 'loveliness', in the context of scientific hypotheses, but concedes that the evaluatory criteria applicable in relation to testimonial statements might perhaps be less data-driven and more inclined towards a psychological judgement of the testifier and her testimony. Such criteria might include sincerity, intelligibility, plausibility, or coherence with background evidence of the testifier's reliability or truthfulness.

[12] The IBE process logically seems to presuppose that there is more than one candidate explanation, and that none of the candidate explanations is clearly identifiable as the actual explanation prior to the application of the IBE test, since otherwise the process would be otiose.

Van Fraassen, though, further argued that in order to be deemed reliable, IBE should be capable of identifying, at least typically, the explanation of the relevant evidence which is *absolutely* the best of all conceivable explanations, and not merely the best explanation among those candidate explanations of which the *particular agent* (the hearer, in the case of testimony) can conceive. In other words, IBE's reliability depends on at least one of the candidate explanations being *absolutely* the best explanation. Otherwise, he argues the explanation identified may well be no more than 'the best of a bad lot' (van Fraassen, 1989: 143, cited by Douven, 2017: 8). Consequently, he argues, since we cannot assume that an agent is typically capable of identifying such an *absolutely* best explanation, IBE is*, a priori*, implausible (ibid. : 144).

This objection, though, strikes me as less convincing than that outlined in the preceding paragraph, and one has to question whether van Fraassen's absolutist bar is not implausibly high, at least in relation to the justification of a testimonial utterance, and particularly one relating to a catastrophic experience. Moreover, the assumption in van Fraassen's argument that the determination of an *absolutely* best explanation for the success of a given hypothesis is typically objectively possible, even in a scientific context, may itself be questionable. Richard Rudner (1953) argues, for instance, that the perceived dichotomy between making value judgements 'in a typically ethical sense', and the 'methods and procedures of science' is a false one. No scientific hypothesis, he said, can ever be deemed completely verified, and accordingly scientists are bound to make value judgements in deciding whether to accept or reject them. Moreover, these decisions may be ethically guided, for example by the consequences of making a mistake in accepting or rejecting a hypothesis, such as one which posits that a toxic ingredient of a drug is not present in a lethal quantity (Rudner, 1953:2-3). Helen Longino (2019) also repudiates the popular conception of scientific hypotheses being epistemically reliable because they are based on the results of experiments and observational studies which are supported by independent repetition. In practice, she maintains, the findings of many such studies are accepted on trust, as indeed are some reports of the failure to replicate their results. Thus, she says, in the scientific world as in the non-scientific world 'knowledge grows by depending on the testimony of others' (Longino, 2019: 4). Longino also stresses the social dimension of scientific knowledge; its reliance on shared ethical values across the scientific community, but also its susceptibility to various forms of bias, for example

along gender, language or nationality lines. Rudner and Longino's comments seem to me to make the application of IBE to testimony, and catastrophe testimony in particular, appear more possible.

My own principal reservation regarding IBE in the context of this dissertation, though, is whether, and to what extent, it really opens up new pathways in the evaluation of testimony. How far would its application typically result in an evaluatory outcome materially different from that applied by an epistemically virtuous and alert non-reductionist, or local reductionist, in an identical situation, with an identical social background, character, and prejudices? What evidence is there, in a testimonial context, and especially one relating to the evaluation of catastrophe testimony, that IBE is methodologically superior *in practice* to other accounts? Certainly, it seems potentially well equipped to deal specifically with the justification of testimony whose truthfulness may ultimately not be objectively or empirically demonstrable, and this might point to its possible appeal in relation to catastrophe testimony in particular. That potential, though, is limited so long as the discussion of issues such as what constitutes the 'best' explanation is constrained by the boundaries of the epistemic evaluation, and I don't myself see, within the conceptualisation of IBE, a means of its liberation from that constraint. Moreover, IBE, as in the case of the other accounts examined in this chapter, still appears largely wedded to the concept of testimony as an assertoric speech-act, as Lipton concedes.

4.2 Virtue Epistemology

The basic idea underpinning virtue epistemology is that 'knowledge is true belief that is gained as a result of the reliable operation of *epistemic virtues*, or *cognitive faculties'* [of the knowledge acquirer] (Pritchard, 2014: 58). Cognitive faculties in this context are natural, or innate, faculties, such as perception, intuition, and memory, whilst epistemic virtues are 'cultivated' character traits, such as conscientiousness, intellectual courage, perseverance, and open-mindedness, which 'promote intellectual flourishing', or 'make for an excellent cognizer' (Turri, Alfonso and Greco, 2019: 3). In what follows, I assume that the term 'virtue epistemology' embraces *both* cognitive values and epistemic virtues.

Virtue epistemology aims to take the issue of the formation of true beliefs beyond conventional epistemic preoccupations with the concept of knowledge as justified true belief into other cognitive realms, such as deliberation, understanding, wisdom and empathy, and

into contact with other fields of cognitive studies, such as psychology, sociology, and life sciences (ibid: 4). The virtue epistemological concept of knowledge as 'non-accidentally true belief' posits that an epistemic agent, such as the hearer or reader in the case of testimony, can only acquire true beliefs through the competent employment of her intellectual virtues, and not, for example, through epistemic luck. Sosa, for example, suggests an analogy between a person who acquires true beliefs in this way and an archer who reliably hits the bullseye of his target through skill and judgment, rather than through a lucky shot (one, for example, which is mis-aimed, but hits the bullseye due to the lucky intervention of a gust of wind). In other words, virtue epistemologists claim that you can only *know* something if you deserve credit for believing its truth. Consequently, they argue, knowledge is more valuable than true belief acquired non-virtuously, even if both serve equally well for guiding the agent's actions (ibid: 6-8).

The idea of knowledge as true belief acquired though learned cognitive virtues, notes Linda Zabzebski, can be traced back to the notion of *episteme* '(knowledge', or 'understanding'), which Plato associated with *techne*; practical human arts or skills which might be acquired in such diverse fields as medicine, hunting, shipbuilding, and cooking, perhaps as part of some more holistic quest to become a more virtuous person (Zagzebski, 2001: 240). Aristotle also taught that epistemic virtues, as distinct from perceptions, must be learned over time, by exercising them, as builders learn by building, or musicians by playing instruments (ibid., citing Aristotle, The Nicomachean Ethics: 1103a, 14-25). Epistemic virtues are thus also social virtues, in that they are learned from others within epistemic communities, for example by imitating virtuous agents, or from taking to heart cautionary tales of epistemic vice, and are then in turn passed on to others who also wish to acquire them. The question, therefore, is whether the epistemic virtues which may be cultivated in this way might include those which are relevant to the evaluation of testimony.

Criticisms of virtue epistemology as a compelling universal account of knowledge acquisition focus both on its premise that acquiring knowledge *requires* the exercise by an agent of cognitive skills, or abilities, and/or epistemic virtues, and upon the claim that virtue epistemology offers a solution to the problem raised by Gettier cases: scenarios in which an agent acquires a justified true belief yet at the same time lacks knowledge relating to that

belief because that belief is luckily true.[13] The nub of the latter criticism is that the agent's performance, however epistemically competent, can never be immune to chance. In the archer scenario, for example, the skilled archer's next attempt may have found the bullseye only because his shot, having been blown off-course by an unlucky gust of wind, had then been luckily redirected to its target by a second, lucky, gust of wind. How, in such circumstances, the argument goes, could he be said to deserve credit for hitting the bullseye on the first occasion, but not on the second?

Jennifer Lackey (2007) presents the following scenario in support of her argument that one can acquire knowledge without deserving any credit for its acquisition:

> Having just arrived in Chicago, Morris asks the first adult passer-by how to get to the Sears Tower. The passer-by, who happens to be a Chicago resident who knows the city extraordinarily well, provides Morris with impeccable directions to the Sears Tower. Morris unhesitatingly forms the corresponding true belief.

Morris, argues Lackey, has clearly acquired testimonial knowledge concerning the location of the Sears Tower as a direct result of the local knowledge which the passer-by whom Morris *luckily* accosted happened to possess. However, Morris deserves no particular credit for forming his true belief, and therefore cannot, according to virtue epistemologists, be said to know the location of the Sears Tower. Alternatively, if acquiring a true belief in this way can be creditable, then Gettier-type cases of lucky belief are equally creditable, in which case the notion of credit espoused by virtue epistemology means very little epistemically, if anything at all (Lackey, 2007: 355). Moreover, she suggests, even if Morris's choice of speaker had been more 'creditable'--- if for example, cognisant of the fact that his destination was in a business district, he had deliberately approached a passer-by whose appearance was that of a businessman---the most salient causal factor of him acquiring a true belief in the location of his destination would still have remained the local knowledge his informant *happened* to

[13] An example of a Gettier case is the 'stopped clock' scenario, in which the agent forms a belief about the time of day by looking at a stopped clock she reasonably supposes to be working. However, since she happens by pure luck to be looking at the clock at the precise moment when it is showing the right time of day, she in fact forms a belief about what the time is, which is both true and justified. Her belief does not, however, constitute knowledge, because it is pure luck that it is true. Gettier cases therefore show that the analysis of knowledge as justified true belief is not universally sustainable (Pritchard, 2014: 202).

possess. Lackey thus concludes that what she calls the Deserving Credit View of Knowledge must be false.

It seems hard to deny that Lackey's illustration exposes a significant challenge to the virtue epistemology conception of knowledge, though not perhaps one which amounts *per se* to proof of its falsity. What it certainly demonstrates, however, is that VE is another conceptual account of belief justification, or knowledge acquisition the criteria governing which are subject to significant exceptions, which may lead to its rules being seen more as rules of thumb, as in the case of non-reductionist, or reductionist rules. Moreover, from the perspective of catastrophe testimony, it does not seem to me that any failure (if such it is) of virtue epistemology, or any other epistemic account , to offer a Gettier-proof account of knowledge is really that significant in practice. Perhaps, then, we should simply allow that the virtue epistemic thesis, in common with other epistemic accounts, is flawed and does not apply in certain important cases, such as mundane testimony, and perhaps others categories already discussed, such as knowledge acquired from a parent or teacher in childhood, or from an expert, or authoritative, source in later life.

In fact, if virtue epistemology is to have particular value and importance from the perspective of catastrophe testimony, this does not appear to me to lie principally in its development as a specifically epistemic thesis. Rather, it lies in the possibility of its application more holistically, as a virtue-theoretic hermeneutical contribution to the development of an account of hearing or reading catastrophe testimony in which epistemological, psychological, and ethical elements might be brought together, which is the direction in which I find this dissertation organically turning given that the reach of its subject matter extends significantly beyond that of propositional statements. The key question, therefore, is whether approaching the task of evaluating catastrophe testimony within a virtue-epistemological framework might constitute a fruitful approach to the task of rendering the testimony of victims of catastrophic experiences intelligible in ways *beyond* those which are possible via other epistemic accounts. By way of illustrating some of the points at issue in relation to such an exercise I now turn briefly to a different but to my mind analogous context in which such a question has previously been considered: that of 'epistemic injustice'.

Case study: Epistemic Injustice

'Epistemology as it has traditionally been pursued' says Miranda Fricker in her introduction to her book *Epistemic Injustice*, 'has been impoverished by the lack of any theoretical framework conducive to revealing the ethical and political aspects of our epistemic conduct' (Fricker, 2007: 2). Her book is in part an attempt to rectify this perceived deficiency, in the specific context of what she calls epistemic injustice. Epistemic injustice, Fricker says, arises whenever a speaker is the victim of 'identity-prejudicial credibility deficit' (IPCD); that is when, as a consequence of often unreflective identity- prejudicial stereotyping, such as that arising from racial or gender prejudice, the speaker is given a deflated level of credibility by a hearer *specifically in her capacity as a knower.* Testimonial injustice, says Fricker, is the form of epistemic injustice which results when IPCD prejudices a hearer's judgment of a speaker's credibility as a testifier. Hermeneutical injustice, on the other hand, says Fricker, is the form of epistemic injustice suffered by members of a 'hermeneutically marginalised' groups in society who are deprived of the social language in which to articulate, or even develop a social awareness of, the injustice they suffer. The example she cites is that of women who suffered sexual harassment before that concept became properly socially recognised or understood, and as a consequence were prevented from rendering their experience credible or even intelligible to others, and even to themselves (ibid. :4-7). And of course testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice are causally connected, since each acts on the other.

The part of Fricker's book which most closely connects with the themes of this dissertation is that in which she seeks to demonstrate how the tendency to make identity-prejudicial credibility judgements can be corrected by hearers through cultivating epistemic virtues specifically targeted at seeking out and correcting for identity-prejudicial bias in themselves. She suggests that this work should be carried out by hearers within a virtue epistemological framework, in which the hearer can, through developing epistemic virtues such as open-mindedness, balance, and intellectual courage, become a 'responsible' or 'virtuous' hearer. Fricker envisages this process as one akin to the Aristotelian notion of developing other knowledge-based virtues through cultivating them over time, like those of builders or musicians, but in a moral context, so that a hearer becomes someone who learns to exercise 'rational sensibility, without inference, so as to be critically open to the word of others' (ibid. :71).

Fricker claims that credibility judgments made in a virtue-epistemological framework can be more socially and morally nuanced than those made following the principles laid down by 'theory-laden perceptions', such as non-reductionism or reductionism. Her declared objection to non-reductionism is methodological rather than conceptual. She argues that it wrongly assumes that our critical faculties are awakened from 'snooze' (critically unreflective) mode into an alert critical mode only on receiving some 'cue for doubt', whereas in reality our critical faculties are in a constant mode of 'critical openness'. However I think she unjustifiably conflates the non-reductionist presumptive *right of trust*, or *a-priori entitlement* to accept the word of others as a default position, with that of a permanent unreflexive cognitive state. Nevertheless, it seems she is not conceptually opposed to and is conceptually non-reductionism. She is, however, apparently conceptually opposed to reductionism though she seems to conflate it with global reductionism, whereas her virtue-epistemological framework in my view much more closely resembles that of local reductionism, as expounded by Elizabeth Fricker (1994,1995). The key point, however, is that *contra* both non-reductionism and reductionism, Miranda Fricker argues that the epistemic virtues required to become a 'responsible' or 'virtuous' hearer must be specifically learned or cultivated; that the sensibility and perceptual capacity of hearers need to be developed in such a way that they come to see the world 'in moral colour', but remain at the same time able to exercise their judgment in a non-inferentially rational way thus enabling them to give a 'suitably critical' reception to the word of others (ibid. :71). The virtuous hearer, she suggests, is analogous to a virtuous ethical agent - someone who, through a proper moral upbringing and socialization has developed a sensitivity to the morally salient features of any given situation in which he finds himself. The virtuous hearer, on the other hand, is someone who has a socially developed sensitivity to the epistemically salient features of any given testimonial presentation - notably the testifier's sincerity, and competence - which is *guided* but not *ruled*, by epistemic norms or criteria, and allows for an evaluation which is both intellectual and phenomenal. A perception of a speaker as trustworthy, for example, would embody a *feeling* of trust in her (ibid. :80). Fricker envisages that her paradigmatic 'virtuous' hearer would be able to develop a spontaneous (unreflective) critical sensitivity which is permanently 'in training', and continuously adapting and developing towards a non-inferentialist epistemic 'second nature' which is both rational and ethical in nature (ibid. :81-5).

Fricker's thesis is not without its critics. The following are the key issues that have been raised by commentators:

1. What Fricker describes as testimonial injustice is not a distinct phenomenon, but rather a context in which the phenomenon of identity-prejudicial credibility deficit manifests itself.

2. Identity-prejudicial credibility deficit is not a distinctly epistemic phenomenon, though the harm it does may be epistemic in nature. It is rather an instance of a more widely experienced social and cultural phenomenon of identity-prejudicial judgements typically derived from the social or cultural stereotyping and devaluation of speakers by reason of their gender, race, ethnicity, or membership of some community or group. Moreover its application in practice can vary, depending on factors such as context, the social situations of particular hearers relative to the relevant speakers, the respective characters of the parties, and their personal interaction.

3. Fricker has not shown that a virtue-epistemological framework is conceptually or methodologically necessary for the task of monitoring or correcting for testimonial injustice, or can successfully develop *generally applicable* epistemic virtues which cannot be developed through the application of other moral or epistemic principles or methodologies. More broadly, since stereotypical identity prejudice is a social phenomenon, and often held unreflectively, the extent to which it is correctable through what Fricker calls a distinctively *reflexive* critical social awareness must be debateable.

Benjamin Sherman is one critic who questions Fricker's notion of there being a virtue of testimonial justice for which she says individuals can aim in practice; that is that identity-prejudiced credibility judgements can be self-corrected by hearers (Sherman, 2016: 229-231). Firstly, he points out, such prejudices, are typically deeply embedded in social structures, and correcting them may thus require societal rather than individual action. Secondly, he cites the arguments of 'situationists', who deny that humans have stable character traits that are exercisable consistently over a whole range of situations, arguing instead that situational factors irrelevant to moral or epistemic reasoning can have a significant impact on human thoughts and actions. Thus, he notes, one cannot simply assume that because an individual

may exhibit a virtue such as intellectual courage or open-mindedness in one situation he will be disposed to do so in all situations (ibid.:233-4). Thirdly, he questions the extent to which correcting for epistemic injustice is psychologically possible in practice, rather than merely a worthy ideal. If your racial or gender prejudice is unconscious, for example, how can you knowingly correct for it? And even if you are made aware of it, what evidence is there that your likely response would be to correct for it? In the absence of evidence of the existence of a *general* disposition to correct for such prejudices, asks Sherman, would it not be better to see testimonial injustice as symptomatic of a wider social prejudice avoidable or correctable, if at all, through the development of appropriate counter-strategies based on existing general rational and moral criteria, rather than the development of a specific virtue-theoretic framework targeted at the specific aim of epistemic or testimonial justice.

José Medina offers a socially-centred critique of Fricker's notion of epistemic injustice, which stresses the importance of connecting specific instances of injustice to what is happening in societies as a whole. He sees identity-prejudicial credibility deficit as part of a much wider, more socially pervasive, phenomenon in which certain groups in society are routinely given disproportionally excess collective creditability and others routinely given disproportionally deflated credibility, across a whole range of social situations, both banal and otherwise (Medina, 2011:17-20). He cites by way of example, studies which show that teachers in American universities are typically invested with more authority by students if they are white, or male, or native English speakers, than those who are not.

The criticisms of Sherman and Medina seem to me largely valid. Of course I accept that identity prejudice affects judgements concerning a speaker's credibility, but I don't see testimonial injustice as a distinct epistemic phenomenon directed *specifically against the speaker in her capacity as a knower*. Rather, I see it as a particular manifestation of a prejudice against her as a *human being* in the form of an attack on her credibility as a knower. More to the point from the perspective of this dissertation, I agree with Sherman that even if testimonial injustice were to be considered as an epistemic phenomenon, it is doubtful that a specifically virtue-epistemological framework is necessary or especially effective means of correcting for it, or indeed that such injustices are *systemically* correctable at all. Nor, as Sherman says, does Fricker offer any practical guidance as to *how* epistemic agents might develop truth-seeking epistemic virtues which *typically* achieve epistemic success, for

example in evaluating the traumatic memories of survivors of catastrophic experiences, assuming they are not specifically professionally trained to do so. Finally, I would maintain that, as Fricker herself concedes, many identity prejudices such as racial prejudice and gender prejudice are frequently so deeply and widely socially embedded that identifying and correcting for them is a task that can only be undertaken by collective action across societies rather than individually.

The fundamental point, though, is that the virtues which are needed to correct for vice of making identity-prejudicial judgements of others, such as tolerance, open-mindedness, or fairness, are not specifically epistemic virtues, but general human and social virtues. Sometimes such virtues can be self-cultivated, and sometimes the prejudice is too deeply ingrained to be corrected, but this depends on the character, social background, and personal experience of the agent, rather her adherence to a 'top-down' conceptual framework. To call the process epistemological then, however liberal the epistemological framework one chooses, simply unnecessarily reduces the scope of one's contemplation of it. And of course Fricker does not claim her thesis applies outside the realm of propositional statements – in fact her case studie involve specifically the role of propositional statements *as evidence*, which to my mind narrows the scope of their application even further.

4.3 Understanding

Linda Zagzebski (2001) argues that the 'information model' account of knowledge acquisition - that which emphasises the epistemic values of certainty, and belief justification, and the acquisition of knowledge though the transmission of propositional information—is only one of two historically dominant such accounts. The other account, she says, which has been neglected in modern times, but which has its origins in the thinking of Plato and Aristotle, is based on a more ethical concept of knowledge, which emphasises the epistemic values of understanding and explanation, rather than certainty and justification. This account understands the work of epistemology as being concerned with non-propositional as well as propositional 'structures of reality', as for example in understanding the character of a person, a piece of music, or a work of art. The concepts of knowledge and understanding are closely related, Zagzebski notes, having a common root in the Platonic/ Aristotelian notion of *episteme* (discussed in the preceding section). However, she maintains, understanding 'aims at comprehensiveness, not exactness' (Zagzebski, 2001:

244). She argues for the rehabilitation of the understanding-based account of knowledge by contemporary philosophers.

The criteria for what constitutes successful understanding though, Zagzebski admits, are 'not as clear as we would want', and neither are they, in a testimonial context, easy to envisage. A definition of understanding, she concedes, cannot be as specific as a definition of knowledge, but can, she claims, be arrived at by looking at those intellectual virtues which aim not at truth, but understanding; virtues which are as yet unanalysed, even unrecognized, and hard to pinpoint, but which, like knowledge, can be taught, or self-taught. This should therefore be epistemology's project (ibid. : 249-50). In effect, as I read her thesis, she is endorsing virtue epistemology as a methodological framework, but suggesting replacing the acquisition of knowledge as its objective with understanding.

I am instinctively sympathetic towards the goals of this project, but once again cannot really envisage how it could work specifically in relation to catastrophe testimony. Even if it were possible to demonstrate that understanding is distinguishable from 'informational' knowing, one would have to demonstrate further how that distinction made it possible to 'understand' elements of catastrophe testimony which could not be understood following the information model of evaluation, and I don't find any evidence in Zagzebski's account of how this might be done. Further I have the same problem with the notion of there being 'understanding-specific' intellectual virtues as I had with Fricker's notion of there being epistemologically specific intellectual virtues.

4.4 Empathy

If the ability of those who hear or read catastrophe testimony to understand it may be limited, then the ability of hearers or readers of such testimony to empathise with testifiers is perhaps even more limited, since as well as knowing what testifiers are thinking and feeling, empathy requires hearers or readers to 'emotionally engage with them and share their thoughts and feelings' (Stueber, 2019: 1). The term 'empathy' notes Karsten Stueber, was introduced into the English language in 1909, as a translation of the German term *Einfühlung* ('feeling into') , after the German philosopher Theodor Lipps, in which context it is 'more specifically understood as a phenomenon of ''inner imitation'' where my mind mirrors the mental activities or experiences of another person based on observations of his bodily activities or facial expressions', for example instinctually imitating the angry face of

another person by feeling anger (ibid. : 3). Lipps apparently claimed that empathy should be seen as a *primary* epistemic means for gaining knowledge of the minds of others, but , says Stueber, failed to explain how this could give us an epistemically sanctioned understanding of the minds of others, or why 'feeling into' the mind of another person 'is more than a mere projection' (ibid. :4).

Stueber notes Lipps's claims for empathy are likely to be rejected by those who believe epistemic agents always act within a social and cultural context - those in the hermeneutical tradition, for example, for whom a reading of other minds which is not culturally mediated is a naïve one (ibid. :9). Psychologists, on the other hand, are concerned to distinguish empathy and other reactive emotions. Notable among these other emotions from the perspective of catastrophe testimony are *sympathy* - an emotion having as its object another person's negative emotion, or plight, from someone who cares for their wellbeing, but not one which is congruent with that other person's feelings - and *personal distress* - responding emotionally to another person's negative emotion, or plight, not by feeling distressed for them, but just by feeling distressed (ibid. :13-14).

Jean Améry firmly rejected the notion that those who had not themselves been victims of a catastrophic experience such as that endured by Holocaust victims could ever empathise with former victims like himself, however good their intentions. The context is a passage in his essay 'On the Necessity and Impossibility of Being a Jew', the last essay in his book *At the Mind's Limits*, in which he points out to those Jews who were not victims of the Holocaust that they should not claim to existentially identify with those who were. He continues;

> By no means do I say this with pride. It would be ridiculous enough to boast of something that one did not do but only underwent. Rather it is with certain shame that I assert my sad privilege and suggest that while the Holocaust is truly the existential reference point for all Jews, only, we, the sacrificed, are able to spiritually relive the catastrophic event as it was or fully picture it as it could be again. Let others not be prevented from empathizing. Let them contemplate the fate that yesterday could have been and tomorrow can be theirs. Their intellectual efforts will be met with our respect, but it will be a sceptical one, and in conversation with them we will soon grow

> silent and say to ourselves: go ahead, good people, trouble your heads as much as you want; you still sound like a blind man talking about color (sic). (Améry, 1999: 93).

When Améry talks of 'good people' empathizing, what he is actually talking about, per Stueber, is those people sympathizing, or, if their emotions are self-directed , exhibiting personal distress, or what might also be called sentimentality.

4.5 Moral Expectation of Epistemic Trust

The final suggestion for developing the notion of belief justification I want to briefly note is that described by Sanford Goldberg (2019) which he calls the 'moral expectation of epistemic trust' (MEET). This account argues from the anti-reductionist premise that recipients have a default but defeasible *entitlement* to accept 'observed testimony' as true to an ethical conclusion that *testifiers* should enjoy a corresponding default but defeasible *moral entitlement* to expect their (undefeated) testimony to be accepted as trustworthy . This suggestion is particularly intriguing in relation to catastrophe testimony.

Unfortunately, though, Goldberg sees any attempt to establish a direct link between the notion of an epistemic *entitlement* to accept the word of a speaker, and the notion that the failure to accept her word should be deemed as in some way morally 'disrespecting' her as problematic, because whilst anti-reductionist accounts establish a right or entitlement to believe the word of a testifier, they do not deem it epistemically improper not to believe her. Consequently, he finds that some 'bridge' needs to be established to connect the anti-reductionist hearer's *entitlement* to believe to a putative speaker's moral *right* to be believed. After canvassing and rejecting other options[14], Goldberg concludes that such a connection would require a 'particularly strong' version of anti-reductionism, which would not only deem it epistemically *permissible* for recipients to accept 'observed testimony' as true (absent defeaters) but also *impermissible not to* accept such testimony as true. The suggestion is that this would in turn make non-acceptance not only a breach of an epistemic requirement but also a manifestation of a kind of disrespect for the testifier's authority, thus putting the recipient in breach of a moral requirement to accept that authority. That, says Goldberg, is not workable; one simply cannot argue from anti-reductionism to MEET

[14] Goldberg's analysis merits a closer and more detailed reading than the focus of this dissertation can allow.

merely by inferring the existence of ethical features of the act of testifying. The fact is that anti-reductionism grants an epistemic permission to accept the speaker's say-so but does not oblige the recipient to accept it, and thus cannot constitute a viable premise for the establishment of a speaker's moral entitlement to expect to be trusted. Consequently, Goldberg concludes, since any plausible account of MEET will have to employ anti-reductionism as its premise, the prospects for its successful application must be considered to be dim. Moreover, as in the case of other accounts of epistemic or epistemically derived justification reviewed above, the debate around MEET analysed by Goldberg assumes that the act of testifying constitutes a speech act addressed to one or more hearers in the speaker's presence, which would in any event severely restrict its application to catastrophe testimony.

4.6 Summary

I have endeavoured in this and the previous chapter to canvass as widely as is feasible within the scope of this dissertation a variety of epistemological accounts of belief justification and knowledge acquisition in an effort to test the possibility of extending the epistemological concept of justified true belief beyond that relating to the propositional content of catastrophe testimony. In effect, I have been exploring the possibility of narrowing the epistemological chasm between testifiers and the world manifested by such testimony by transforming the 'informational model' of belief justification into a more philosophically holistic model which could embrace non-propositional and even subjective elements of testimonial content, and also non-epistemological concepts of belief justification. That this goal has proved unattainable is not a criticism of the epistemological accounts of testimony I have examined but more a confirmation of the reality that accounts specifically conceived for the purpose of epistemically justifying beliefs in verbally transmitted propositional information cannot in my view be reconfigured so as to permit other kinds of evaluation, or the evaluation of other kinds of testimonial content.

The epistemological chasm between survivors and the world revealed by catastrophe testimony is thus essentially that in which one finds everything said by the testifier in relation to her catastrophic experience, or her existence as a survivor of that experience, which cannot be justifiably believed by a recipient of her testimony as a propositional statement. Sensations

and feelings such as the pain of torture, or the fear of being selected for the gas chamber, for example, are located in that chasm.

What I also discovered, however, is that the chasm between survivors who produce accounts of their catastrophic experiences and the world is much more than a knowledge gap. It is an existential, experiential and moral chasm, of which the epistemological chasm is an important but by no means the only part. The story of my exploration of the nature and extent of that chasm is told in the following chapters of this dissertation, I begin that journey of exploration with an examination of the source of catastrophe testimony – memory.

PART THREE

THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF CATASTROPHE TESTIMONY

CHAPTER 5. CATASTROPHE TESTIMONY'S ORIGINS IN MEMORY

5.1 Background to and Scope of This Chapter

Catastrophe testimony is sourced from memory, or more specifically from the post-traumatic recollection of catastrophic personal experiences held in the testifier's memory. The period for which they have been held in memory prior to their retrieval for the purposes of testifying might be as short as a few hours, or as long as decades. Similarly, such retrieval might be occurring for the first time, or it might be the latest of many retrievals of that memory belief—perhaps thousands. If, for example, someone was to say of an experience occurring ten years earlier that 'not a day goes by when I do not think of it', then even if recollection had occurred only once during each day, that would amount to more than 3,500 separate instances of recollection within that period. Hence the importance of engaging with the question of how memory functions, or malfunctions both generally, and specifically as a source of catastrophe testimony.

There are a number of different kinds of memory recognised by philosophers, and also by psychologists and others engaged in studying the workings of the human mind. Catastrophe testimony, however, mostly involves what is referred to as *episodic memory*, though it also sometimes incorporates what is referred to as *semantic memory*. Episodic memory is memory of experiences and events from one's own past, such as when I remember driving along a particular street or dining at a particular restaurant in Paris. Semantic memory is memory of things one has learned about the world without having experienced or witnessed them directly, for example that Paris is the capital of France, or that there is a well-known restaurant in Paris called La Rotonde. However, memories of events from one's own past can also be acquired semantically, one example being 'relearned' experiences, such as remembering a visit you made to the Eiffel Tower as a child only as a result of your parents having subsequently related the story of that visit to you. Episodic and semantic memory are

known as *declarative* memory - memory which can be stored in and retrieved from a subject's consciousness (Michaelian and Sutton, 2017: 4-5).[15]

In addition to there being different kinds of memory, there are also a variety different contexts in which memories might be recollected and conveyed to others as testimony. In the case of memories of catastrophic experiences, such as those of Holocaust survivors, these might include evidence given in judicial proceedings, witness statements given to investigatory bodies, sound or video recordings made for the benefit of archival institutions, speeches made in public or at private events, programmes made for radio, television, or internet distribution, or memories evoked in the course of a therapeutic process. Last, but by no means least, a vast range of such recollections can be found in personal accounts by survivors of their lives, in many narrativized forms, including autobiographies, and 'factitious' works (fictionalised treatments of autobiographical experiences, such as Imre Kertesz's account of a teenager's experience as a concentration camp inmate, in his novel *Fatelessness*), essays, and poems.

From a historical perspective, general philosophical speculation concerning the nature, and role, of memory goes back at least as far as the writings of Plato, but contemporary discourse has more proximate origins in the writings of Locke, Reid and Hume. The three philosophers differed in their conception of the nature of a memorial belief, and more specifically that of a retrieved memory belief, but all of them subscribed to what we nowadays call the *preservationist,* or *archivalist,* account of the function of memory. This account has long been regarded as the classic account of memory's nature and role, but has in more recent times been challenged by other accounts more aligned to contemporary research into the workings of memory carried out by psychologists and cognitive scientists, the most widely accepted of which are those which espouse the *generativist*, *constructivist*, or *reconstructivist* account of memory (collectively referred to as the generativist account herein).

More will be said on the distinctions between these accounts below, but in simple terms the preservationist account views the role of memory as essentially passive; that of encoding, storing, and ultimately reproducing, in a form which is as near its original form as the power of the individual's memory permits, the content of a particular memory. The generativist

[15] The term episodic memory was coined by Endel Tulving as ' the what, the where, and the when memory' of an experienced event in Tulving, 1972. Tulving later developed his theory In Tulving, 1983, and Tulving, 1985.

accounts of the functioning and role of memory, on the other hand, hold variously that memory plays a wider, dynamic, cognitive role, which has the ability to, and typically does, generate, or construct new informational content, and/or reconstruct or reimagine, existing memorial content, at every stage from encoding up to, and especially at, retrieval.[16] This debate can no longer be confined purely within a philosophical context, since the question of how memory functions is one that has also become important to psychologists, at least since the time of Freud, and others active in various fields of cognitive science. Of particular interest to contemporary commentators is whether what have been traditionally perceived as intentional or unintentional memory errors, inaccuracies, or malfunctions, such as forgetting, misremembering, or confabulation, should be reinterpreted within the context of the wider operation of a more intentional cognitive process, of which memory is only a part.

Two alternative accounts of the workings of memory are also briefly summarised below. The first is the *causalist* theory of memory, which lies conceptually somewhere between the preservationist and generationist accounts. It requires, as necessary and (more or less) sufficient conditions for successful remembering, the existence of a causal connection, generated through a continuous memory trace, between an original remembered experience and the retrieved memorial representation of it, but does not require the retrieved memory trace to match precisely the original memory belief, nor that the rememberer should be aware of the connection. The second account is the *simulation* theory, which sees episodic remembering as a process of mental time travel akin to mindreading.

My objective in this Chapter is limited to setting the contemporary debate concerning the nature and role of memory within a context which will facilitate the discussion which follows it, concerning the particular case of remembering and recollecting traumatic personal experiences, and specifically catastrophic experience.

[16] There are a number of variations on these non-preservationist themes; see, for example Lackey, 2007, Shanton and Goldman, 2010, Michaelian ,2011, 2013, and 2016, and De Brigard ,2014.

5.2 The Historical Foundations of the Debate Regarding the Nature and Role of Memory

Plato

In Plato's *Theaetetus,* concerning the nature of knowledge, Socrates asks Theaetetus, in one passage, the 'Wax Tablet' passage (190e-196c), to imagine that our mind contains a wax tablet , and that whenever we want to remember something it stamps the impression of what it is we wish to remember into the wax tablet, as if making an impression with a signet ring, in order that it can be preserved there until it is erased (forgotten).

In one part of the passage, Socrates likens variations in the quality of individual memories to variations in the quality of wax; a good memory is like a good quality wax, one which is deep and smooth, and of the right consistency, easily absorbing and retaining a faithful impression, whilst a poor memory either leaves insufficiently deep impressions, like a wax which is too hard, or leaves an impression which is unclear, like a wax which is too soft, or impure. (*Theaetetus*, 194-5).[17] Aristotle, in his later conception of the Wax Tablet analogy, *in De Memoria et Remiscentia* (450a-b), compares soft wax to the memories of children, forming images which do not 'remain in the soul', and hard wax with the memories of old people, which leave no, or too faint, impressions. (Draaisma, 2000: 25).

The wax tablet analogy thus suggests two foundational notions concerning the nature and role of memory. The first is that the role of memory is a preservative one; to record, and retain as clear and faithful an impression of the original content of the subject's memory as her cognitive powers allow, for as long she continues to remember it. The second is that the quality of the content of a retained memory varies according to the cognitive condition, or quality, of the mind which retains it. Plato's vivid conception of memory was largely adopted by Locke, Hume and Reid, and informed the classic preservationist view of memory.

Empirical Accounts of Memory: Locke, Hume and Reid

Differences between the accounts of the memorial process presented by John Locke, and David Hume, on the one hand, and Thomas Reid, on the other hand, centre upon the question: what is the direct object of memory? If, for example, I remember an event or

[17] For detailed commentaries see, for example, Draaisma, 2000, pp.24-27, and Woolf, 2004, pp. 573-604.

experience from my past, to what is my mind directed? Is it to the event or experience itself, as Reid held, or to some mental representation of it in the form of an impression or idea of it, as Locke, and Hume, held?

In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding,* 1975 [1690], Locke describes memory as the 'Store-house of our Ideas', but saw ideas in this context as no more than past perceptions. However, since he also believed that the same perception could not come into existence on more than one occasion, he needed to explain how perceptions could recur as memories in some other way. His answer was to suggest that memory constituted a mental power 'to revive Perceptions, which it once had, with this additional suggested Perception annexed to them, that it has had them before', thus enabling memory to ' paint [those original ideas] anew on its self, though some with more, some with less difficulty; some more lively, others more obscurely.' (Locke, 1975, Book 11.x.1-2). Reid attacked Locke's account of memory on the grounds of circularity, pointing out that in order to be able to revive the original perceptual experience one must first have remembered it, and further that in order to produce a later perception that is qualitatively similar to an earlier perception, one must first be able to recall the quality and character of the earlier perception. However, Reid argued, since neither of these processes appeared possible if, as Locke held, a perception cannot come into existence on more than one occasion, the claim that perception could be revived by memory was false (Copenhaver, 2014: 3 , and Senor,2019: 4)

Hume's alternative account of memory, which is found in his *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2015 [1739], Book 1, Part 1, Sect 3 (Hume, 2015: 9) on the other hand argues that the immediate objects of perception are *impressions*, which the mind could later recollect as a memory, which ' in its new appearance [] retains a considerable degree of its first vivacity, and is somewhat intermediate betwixt an impression and an idea', or as something 'faint and languid' which is' 'of the *imagination'*, and which, if it loses its vivacity entirely, becomes a 'perfect [pure] idea' (ibid.). Thus, Hume notes, whereas memory is 'tied down' by the ' order and form' of the original impression, which it has no power to vary, the imagination is not so tied down. In fact, he adds, it is the chief purpose of memory to preserve the order and form of the original impression, so that departures from that form constitute defects or imperfections of a memory (ibid).

Reid, whose criticism of Hume's theory of memory is underscored by his general opposition to Hume's theory of ideas, questioned the justification for Hume's taxonomy of vivacity. In his *Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense,* 1764, (Reid, 1983, [1764]: 99-100), he argued that whilst Hume's notion of differing degrees of vivacity being attributable to perceptions, memories, and imaginings, might have some empirical validity, the hierarchy was by no means immutable; some memories could be more vivid than the perceptions which gave rise to them, or less vivid than imaginings based on them. A flashback, for example, of an earlier experience may be more vivid than the original perception, or image, of that experience (though that would not necessarily make it more epistemically reliable).

Much later, Bertrand Russell, in his *Analysis of the Mind* (1921), suggested that what distinguishes a memory- image from an imagination- image lies not in the intrinsic quality of the image, but in the fact that memory-images, unlike imagination-images, 'are accompanied by a feeling of belief which may be expressed in the words "this happened" (Russell,1921: 175-6).

Standing in opposition to the theories of Locke and Hume is Reid's direct realist account of memory. Reid's theory of memory holds that the direct objects of memory are not ideas or impressions of that which is being remembered, but the thing itself, such as, in relation to episodic memory, a past event in which the remembering subject participated, or which she witnessed:

> We may remember anything which we have seen, or heard, or known, or done, or suffered; but the remembrance of it is a particular act of the mind which now exists, and of which we are conscious. To confound these two is an absurdity, which a thinking man could not be led into, but by some false hypothesis which hinders him from reflecting upon the thing which he would explain by it. (Essays, 3.1: Reid, 1983,206-7*).*

Moreover, argues Reid, 'Memory is always accompanied with the belief of that which we remember' (ibid.:207) and it is this combination of memory and belief that gives us 'immediate knowledge of things past' as opposed to perception, which gives us immediate knowledge of things present (ibid.: 206).

Modern reviews of Reid's direct realist theory seem to be mixed. Copenhaver, for example notes that it 'captures how memory, like perception, represents the world, rather than our experiences of the world' (Copenhaver, 2014: 8). Marina Folescu, however, questions whether it really differs from Locke's conception of memory as a storehouse of ideas (past perceptions) (Folescu, 2018: 217), which is a valid question, since both accounts seem to me to envisage the subject becoming reacquainted with a past experience through a recollection of it, and the question of whether that recollection is conceived as a reimagining, as in Locke's case, or a re-experiencing as in Reid's case, does not appear to affect the substance of it. Senor suggests that a serious problem facing proponents of a direct realist theory of memory is that of error; if we say that memory gives us immediate knowledge of the past, this does not appear to allow for the fallibility of memory, yet we know that memory is fallible (Senor,2019: 7). Copenhaver, on the other hand, suggests that Reid could in fact have dealt with the challenge of memory errors by characterising them either as an imagining (if you purport to remember something which didn't happen, or didn't happen to you), or a misremembering (if you misremember things *about* the remembered event), akin to misperception.[18]

My understanding is that Copenhaver sees the theories of Locke and Hume as forerunners of the modern preservationist account of memory, but suggests that Reid's opposition to those theories does not necessarily make him a forerunner of the generativist/constructivist account of memory, because his views are not detailed enough concerning *how* memory preserves an acquaintance with the past to enable one to determine whether they are preservationist or generativist in character.

[18] Taken from my notes of comments were made by Copenhaver in her presentation to the Philosophy of Memory Virtual Seminar hosted by Kourken Michaelian and organised by The Centre for Philosophy of Memory, Grenoble, France, on 22nd April, 2020, in which I participated.

5.3 Philosophy Refracted Through Psychology: The Modern Debate Concerning The Workings of Memory

5.3.1: The Preservationist Legacy

Modern preservationist accounts of memory continue to take remembering to be 'essentially a matter of encoding, storing and retrieving information' (MIchaelian and Sutton, 2017: 12). In epistemic terms, the classic preservationist view thus remains that memory cannot be an original source of knowledge, or justified belief; that we cannot come to know (or justifiably believe) that *p* from memory, unless we have first come to know (or justifiably believe) it from a prior source, such as perception. That view entails, in its strict form, not only that memory cannot generate new knowledge (or justified beliefs), but also that it cannot transform an irrational belief into a rational belief, or change the epistemic status of an originally justified belief. All it can do is preserve both belief and justification, but only, in the latter case, if the belief was justified when it was formed (Senor, 2019: 13).

The preservationist account of memory has been increasingly challenged in recent years. Jennifer Lackey (2005, 2007), for example, illustrates, through the presentation of three falsifying scenarios, her claim that the preservationist assumptions that: (1) a proposition which is not known or justifiably believed when first committed to memory cannot come to be known or justifiably believed at a later time, and (2) any knowledge or justified belief that *p* acquired through memory must first have been acquired through a non-memorial source, are both false (Lackey, 2005: 636-7).

Senor, in his (2007) response to Lackey argues that preservationism 'carefully construed' merely contends that no belief 'based on memory' can be known or justified, unless known or justified at an earlier date, *just in virtue of being preserved*, which does not preclude a belief becoming justified *after* becoming a memory belief through 'additional evidence just received' constituting a *new* source of justification. (Senor, 2007: 205-207). This, he argued, was not inconsistent with a preservationist contention that: (1) memory cannot, unlike perception or introspection, be a source of *prima facie* justification or 'epistemization' of a belief, and so cannot be generative, in the sense that those other cognitive sources can be generative, and (2) any power of memory to transform *prima facie* justified or epistemized beliefs which are defeated into *ultima facie* undefeated justified or epistemized beliefs, even if such a transformation were possible, would fall short of being an epistemically generative

power[19]. Lackey (2007) describes this interpretation as revisionist, and, absent some further and better particulars concerning the permitted scope of any 'new source of justification', it certainly appears arguable that Senor's interpretation/reinterpretation of preservationism is, in reality, a weak form of generativism.

Matthew Frise (2017), in another challenge to the preservationist account of memory, identifies three dilemmas which, he claims, confront the argument for memory's capacity to preserve the original justification for the beliefs it retains : (1) the problem of stored belief (the problem of explaining how beliefs continue to be epistemically justified merely by virtue of being stored); (2) the problem of forgotten evidence (the problem of explaining how a belief can remain justified when all past direct evidence for it has been forgotten); and (3) the problem of the failure of recollection (the problem of explaining how, if an agent is unable to recollect when asked, the answer to the question whether *p* or not-*p,* her belief that *p* can nevertheless be considered to remain justified).

However, perhaps the most telling contemporary challenge to the preservationist notion of memory is empirical, namely that it is not only fundamentally at odds with generativist notions of memory, but also with a substantial, and growing, body of scientific evidence and hypotheses produced by psychologists and cognitive scientists concerning the nature and functioning of memory, some of which are explored below.

5.3.2 The Causal Theory of Memory

The basic idea underpinning the causal theory of memory is the requirement for an 'appropriate' causal connection between a subject's recollection of an experience and the experience itself as a necessary and sufficient condition for successful remembering. The classic modern account of causal theory is that of Martin and Deutscher (1966), and their exposition of the theory is perhaps best illustrated by two scenarios described by them. The first is that of a painter who paints a scene which he believes he has depicted from his imagination, but which in fact unconsciously revives a 'memory trace' of a scene he originally witnessed in childhood. This is a case of successful remembering, according to Martin and

[19] 'Epistemization' in Senor's parlance is the process which converts a belief into knowledge. He adds that a belief is *prima facie epistemized* ' if it attains the level of epistemization which, in the absence of undefeated epistemic defeat , will be sufficient for its being *ultima facie* epistemized.' *Ultima facie* epistemization is achieved when a prima facie epistemized belief is undefeated. Typical Gettier cases, he adds, are cases where the epistemization of a belief, rather than its justification, is defeated (ibid.:206-7).

Deutscher's account of causal theory, because there is a causal connection between the painter's childhood experience and his painting of the scene, even though the painter *does not believe* this to be the case, just so long as some memory trace of that original experience has been continuously preserved. The second case is that of someone who experiences, but then forgets, an event, is subsequently reminded of it by a third party, but then forgets being told about it, and finally believes that she directly remembers it as having occurred. This is a case of unsuccessful remembering according to Martin and Deutscher's account because although there is a causal connection, it is not an *appropriate* connection - one between the recovered memory trace of having been told of the experience, and the ultimately retrieved representation of it – but rather one between the recovered memory trace of the original experience and the retrieved representation of it. This is so even though in this case the rememberer *believes* she *has remembered* the original experience. In other words, the causal connection which causal theory requires is one 'which exists continuously in the interval between experiencing and remembering and which contributes to the production of the retrieved representation', irrespective of what the agent believes or does not believe (Michaelian and Sutton, 2017: 15).[20]

The most significant of the issues raised by critics of causal theory, as with the preservationist account of memory, is its apparent indifference to the possibility of work being done by memory between the initial memorising of the original experience and its subsequent recollection, beyond the retention of the original memory trace. Moreover, epistemologists might well argue that since causal theory is essentially preservationist, yet does not require the rememberer to *believe* that the retrieved memory is in fact a memory trace, it is essentially an account of successful remembering, rather than one of belief justification, hence epistemically inadequate.

5.3.3 Generativist Accounts of Memory

The argument for a generativist, constructivist, or reconstructivist account of how memory functions, in contrast to the preservationist and causalist accounts, is multi-disciplinary in nature. It draws not only on philosophical considerations, but also on data, evidence and theorising from the realms of psychology and cognitive science more generally. It seems clear

[20] Another interpretation, suggest Michaelian and Sutton, might be that the first scenario is a case of successful *episodic* memory, whereas the second scenario is a case of successful *semantic* memory (ibid.)

that for psychologists and neuroscientists, the *hippocampus* (the seahorse-shaped component of the brain which plays an important part in the formation, inter alia, of episodic and autobiographical memories) is generally believed to possess both generative, and constructive/reconstructive elements, though the precise nature of the work done by the *hippocampus*, relative to other parts of the brain, may not yet be fully understood. Generativist and constructivist accounts of memory from a philosophical perspective thus in practice occupy territory which is shared with psychological and scientific investigation into the workings of memory[21].

Memory's cognitive capacity, according to generativist accounts of it, is far reaching. Michaelian identifies four components of the cognitive work which it has been said can be done by memory at any time between encoding the original experience into memory, up to, and including, its retrieval, and also between any given retrieval and a subsequent retrieval. These are selection (selecting which incoming stimuli to encode as memory); abstraction (abstracting meaning from the words and language of the message received into memory); interpretation (interpreting what is received in the context of relevant prior knowledge); and integration (producing a holistic integrated representation of the product of memory and the other components) (Michaelian, 2011: 325).

Thus, the adaption, construction, or reconstruction of a belief held in memory may involve the elimination of memory content, or its incorporation with other memory content into a composite memory trace, and a constructed memory may itself be subsequently reconstructed, including on retrieval. In fact, Michaelian suggests that, in the case of episodic memory, retrieval routinely *invokes* reconstruction, implying that episodic memory beliefs presented at *retrieval* in effect *supercede* those held in memory prior to retrieval; that is that memory ultimately *produces* beliefs. (ibid.). Taking that logic one step further, in relation specifically to a testimonial utterance, if we say that the source of such an utterance is memory, then what we mean more precisely is that the source is, in the case of each particular testimonial utterance, whatever memorial belief is retrieved and presented by the testifier *at the time of testifying.*

[21] For a recent overview of the interdisciplinary nature of recent studies of the metaphysics of memory see Michaelian and Sutton,2017, Section 1 and generally.

5.3.4 The Simulation Theory of Memory

Episodic memory according to the simulationist account of it described by Karen Shanton and Alvin Goldman (2010); is a cognitive process of 'high-level simulation-based mind reading'; that is a process of *intrapersonal simulation* (self-directed simulation) using imaginative skills, such as visualisation, to project oneself into the past similar to those employed in mind reading, thus implying that the two processes employ the same type of cognitive mechanisms (Shanton and Goldman, 2010: 531, 534). The idea behind the simulation theory of memory, roughly speaking, is that humans are capable of *mental time travel*, that is of mentally transporting themselves into the past, and transposing images of past events into a 'construction of the personal past', incorporating those images, together with a 'conscious feeling of re-experiencing or re-enacting a previously experienced event', which Tulving called 'autonoetic consciousness' (see also fn.24 above). Episodic memories are thus characterised by their *phenomenal* resemblance to the originally remembered event or experience.

Shanton and Goldman caution, however, that intrapersonal simulation of the type they describe is subject to 'egocentric bias' – that is reappraisal of the rememberer's reaction to past events in the light of subsequent experience. They cite the example of subjects who had felt sad and angry at the withdrawal of a U.S. Presidential candidate, but later recalled much lower levels of sadness or anger if they had in the meantime switched allegiance to another candidate (ibid: 533-4). Michaelian and Sutton note that successful remembering, in a simulationist context, is thus reliant on the ability of the rememberer's imagination to construct an *accurate* representation of the past experience, but leave open the question of how accuracy, in this context, may be objectively measured (Michaelian and Sutton, 2017: 18).

5.4 Memory Errors

Much of the contemporary psycho-philosophical debate surrounding the workings of memory concerns the real nature of what have been traditionally construed as memory errors or malfunctions, such as forgetting, misremembering, and confabulation. Are they cases of the unsuccessful, or unreliable functioning of the faculty of memory, or simply a feature of the ordinary and generally reliable, though not infallible, functioning of memory as a cog in a larger a cognitive wheel ? Michaelian (2013), for example, suggests that, rather than being

symptomatic of some general cognitive malfunction of the agent's memory, they may be instances of untypical methodological lapses in an otherwise generally reliable, though imperfect, adaptive cognitive process, the function of which is to enhance our ultimate capacity to produce true beliefs from recollection, for example through applying inferential reasoning to stored or retrieved memorial content. Felipe De Brigard similarly suggests that what we think of as memory errors may be a sort of epistemic glitch inherent in the operation of a cognitive system that 'mixes and matches' different components of encoded memory traces into 'optimized' representations of possible past events (De Brigard,2014: 155). Evidence gathered over three decades by cognitive scientists, he declares, 'clearly shows that people frequently and ordinarily misremember past experiences' (ibid.). This, he suggests, poses two challenges to philosophical accounts of memory: firstly, a general epistemological challenge to the assumption that memory is necessarily factive (S remembers that *p* can only be true if *p* is in fact the case), and secondly, a specific challenge, to our philosophical understanding of the function of episodic autobiographical memory (ibid.: 156-7).

Focusing on the second challenge, De Brigard argues that many cases of 'seeming to remember' types of misremembering demonstrated by paradigmatic scientific experiments do not really demonstrate instances of memory malfunction.[22] Rather, he suggests, they are everyday phenomena, of which we are often unaware, usually resulting from drawing plausible, but incorrect, inferences about the occurrence of experiences which might well have happened to us, but did not in fact happen (ibid.: 161-3). I might, for example seem to remember seeing an item on a list of items which did not actually appear on that list, but which was of a type closely associated with those that were on the list, such as medical products (of course my recollection would still be epistemically invalid, as an untrue belief, a point which De Brigard concedes).

On De Brigard's simulationist account, these memory errors occur because memory retrieval triggers underlying mechanisms which reconstruct an 'optimized mental representation from the encoded perceptual information according to probabilistic constraints dictated by previous experience'. These, he says, usually coincide with the

[22] De Brigard cites the study in Loftus and Pickrell (1995) which reported that 25% of participants actually falsely remembered being lost in a shopping mall as children if they received suggestive information to that effect in interviews.

originally encoded memory belief, but often do not quite 'map onto' it, causing instances of (apparent) misremembering, or confabulation(ibid. :173). In other words, memory lapses must be expected to occur, as a result of the interaction of the cognitive processes which are engaged in the ordinary course of retrieving episodic memory, even though episodic memories are generally reliable. Sarah Robins (2016), points out, however, that an account which characterises memory as a construction, in which successful remembering, misremembering, and confabulation result from the same cognitive, or inferential process, effectively negates the ability to distinguish, in individual cases, between successful memories and unsuccessful (misremembered) memories, without recourse to some external processing methodology (Robins, 443-4).[23] In his response to Robins, Michaelian (2016) seems to concede that the generativist interpretation of a reliable episodic memory as one produced by a generally reliable episodic construction system (one which tends to produce *mostly* accurate representations), in effect allows that memory can be *both* reliably produced *and at the same time* fail to produce, in any given instance, an accurate representation of a prior memory belief (Michaelian,2016: 7).[24]

From the perspective of catastrophe testimony, then, the issue is how far these conclusions, relating as they do to memory errors or malfunctions demonstrated by 'normal' subjects, usually in scientifically controlled test environments, can be considered relevant to the assessment of the memories of survivors of traumatic experiences, and specifically those invoked in the context of catastrophe testimony. How would a recollection in the form of a traumatic flashback, for example, 'map onto' the inferential cognitive process described by De Brigard? Consequently, whilst it seems right to assume that the generativist account of memory, supported as it is by psychology and science, is the most plausible currently available account of the workings of episodic memory in unexceptional situations, including the

[23] See Robins, 2016. Her own account of memory utilises the Deese-Roediger-McDermott (DRM) experimental paradigm widely used in false memory research, in which patients are shown a list of semantically related items, such as 'nurse',' hospital', and ' medicine', and shortly after a list containing these items plus semantic 'lures': semantically related but previously unlisted items, e.g.'doctor', and unrelated items, e.g. 'apple', and asked to recognise previous items. The experiment shows ' recognition' of previously unlisted lure items is commonly as high as recognition of originally listed items, and much higher than recognition of unrelated items. Robins argues that whereas causal theory can distinguish these cases of successful and unsuccessful remembering, neither preservationist theories nor constructivist/simulationist theories like De Brigard's can do so. She argues for a hybrid account of successful remembering, combining a preservationist notion of recollection as the retrieval of a discrete representation of the past event, and a constructionist notion of the retrieval process.

[24] I should point out that this is a simplified version of the conceptual argument developed at length in Michaelian (2016), which is aimed only at the ground specifically covered by Robins.

overwhelming majority of testimonial encounters we might experience, its ability to 'map onto' memories of catastrophic experiences requires further consideration, in the light of the nature of those experiences.

5. 5 Episodic Memory as a Belief Source : Attempts to Disentangle Truth, Justification, and Accuracy

How compatible, then, is the generativist account of the workings of memory with the epistemological identification of memory's value with its reliability as a source of justified true beliefs, or knowledge?

The epistemic notion of true belief requires both that I justifiedly believe that *p* and that *p* is fact true. However, if, as both Michaelian and De Brigard appear to have conceded, retrieved memories of past experiences may not be accurate, in the sense of a faithful correspondence with the originally remembered experience, and if truth in the context of a memorial representation is construed as synonymous with an accurate representation of the object of the representation (that is in the case of episodic memory the recollected experience), then it would appear that there is a disjunction between the generativist concept of the workings of memory and the epistemic concept of justified true belief. Michaelian (2012) for example argues that the fact that memory may be designed to serve the agent's own best interests does not mean it works to provide the agent with the most accurate information. In fact it may mean that it provides the agent with a good deal of inaccurate information, or perhaps a new representation of the original experience not previously stored in the agent's memory at all, or even 'previously entertained by the agent' (Michaelian, 2012: 501). Some psychologists, in fact, go further, by claiming that since memory is constructive it is *bound* to be false, in the sense of being counterfactive. Thus, some commentators argue, the notion of factual correspondence with the original experience as a measure of accuracy should be abandoned, at least in the case of episodic memory, in favour of that of *authenticity*; correspondence between the retrieved memory representation of that experience and the subject's original *experience* of it (Michaelian and Sutton, 2017: 24, citing Bernecker, 2010). This seems to presuppose, however, the agent's ability to distinguish between the two, which Michaelian suggests is in fact the case, though I am not sure how this has been, or indeed can be, demonstrated.

Michaelian and Sutton, in a rider to this debate, suggest that another way to resolve the disjunction between the generativist account of memory and the epistemological account of justified true belief might be to develop 'a more sophisticated criterion of truth', in relation to memory belief; one that acknowledges that remembering need not be fully accurate to be fully adequate; that 'truth in memory comes in degrees' (ibid.: 15). However, such a concept of truth seems to be clearly at odds with the epistemic notion of truth, in dispensing with the need for an objectively evaluable assessment of true belief, in favour of a reference point which relies, to some unverifiable extent, on the faithfulness of the testifier's recollection of his original experience. Michaelian (2012) had previously suggested that such a recollection would need to have a distinctively phenomenological character; a 'subjective sense of time' which would allow the agent to distinguish remembering and imagining by reference to a feeling of pastness or familiarity that accompany remembering, but not imagining. However, given that such qualities are externally unverifiable, I find it hard to see such a suggestion as amounting to anything more than that the testifier's word must be taken on trust, unless there is compelling counter-evidence of his untrustworthiness.

The issue of belief justification, once one accepts the argument that memory functions as a *belief-producing* mechanism thus seems to me to follow a similar logic to that suggested in the case of true belief. Recollections presented in the form of testimony which can be evaluated by reference to external evidence, such as background evidence or other testimony, may be verified, and justified or defeated, accordingly. Testimonial utterances which cannot be so evaluated, and which represent introspective, or phenomenal, representations of the testifier's experience, can ultimately be taken on trust, and thus deemed justified, unless there is compelling counter-evidence of untrustworthiness on the face of the testimony itself, or by way of background evidence, but perhaps only epistemically justifiable if we interpret the Reidian principles of veracity and credulity as raising a strong presumption of trust in the testifier.

Senor (2009) tackles the issue of belief justification from a different perspective, by asking, even if it were conceptually possible to justify memory beliefs epistemically, what epistemological account could do the necessary epistemic work. He examines that question in relation to what he considers the most important candidate accounts: foundationalism, coherentism, deontological theories, and reliabilism. None of them, he finds, is adequate for

such a task, and concludes that although we may be capable, in scientifically controlled experiments, of successfully testing the memorial performance of individual subjects in specific conditions or situations, we remain unable to demonstrate or test epistemically, the *general* reliability of human memory. Consequently, he concedes, we have no choice but to trust, in the vast majority of cases, what people tell us from memory.

One of the accounts deemed inadequate by Senor is what he called 'experiential foundationalism', and had , in an earlier, more extensive treatment of it (Senor, 1993), called 'phenomenalistic foundationalism'. Michael Huemer is a leading advocate of this account of belief justification (more generally known as 'phenomenal conservatism', but sometimes called 'epistemic conservatism', or 'doxastic conservatism'). For the purpose of this dissertation, my description of his views follows that enunciated in Hasan and Fumerton (2018), [25] according to which Huemer's account holds, in simple terms, that if it seems, or appears, to S that *p*, then, in the absence of defeaters, S has *prima facie* justification for believing that *p*[26]. Phenomenal conservatism, thus defined, permits far more propositions to be *prima facie* justifiably believed than classical foundationalism does, including apparent memories. Proponents of phenomenal conservatism suggest that seemings, or appearances, are distinct from beliefs, or inclinations to believe, yet 'belief-like' in having propositional, or representational, content. They also have, it is argued, a distinctly phenomenal force, such that it 'feels as if' they are true, or provide some 'assurance' of truth, which suggests a link between the strength of the seeming and the degree of the justification it evidences, which seems to echo earlier accounts of memory, such as those of Hume, and Russell.

This concept seems attractive from the perspective of justifying beliefs in the phenomenal elements of catastrophe testimony, but the principal argument raised against phenomenal conservatism, Hasan and Fumerton note, is that it sets the justification bar too low, notably by assuming that seemings, or appearances, accurately represent the world around us. Does, for example, my seeming to see a ghost really constitute a *prima facie* justification for believing there are ghosts, or simply evidence my particular fear of ghosts?

[25] The study focuses on foundationalism about justification. Hasan and Fumerton suggest, however, that much of what they, and those they cite, say, applies also to foundationalism about knowledge.

[26] Seemings, or appearances, note Hasan and Fumerton, could be sensory, perceptual, intellectual, intuitive, mnemonic, or introspective, but in practice phenomenal conservatist accounts are typically limited to perceptual seemings, or appearances.

5.6 Memory as Faithfulness to the Past

A more holistic account of the role, and value, of memory as a portal into the past is that offered by Sue Campbell (2006). She rejects the argument that the conception of memory as a dynamic and reconstructive process necessarily raises questions as to its reliability and integrity as testimony to the past. Successful remembering, she argues, is a richer experience than faithful reproduction, one which seeks to recapture the *significance* of the past in the present, and may thus be reconstructive, selective, or emotionally invested. Memorial accuracy is thus not necessarily synonymous with truth-aptness; sometimes it is the emotional accuracy of memory which determines the significance of the past in the present, the affective side of memory being an integral quality of its representational character. Following the work of Adam Morton (2002), Campbell presents a notion of accuracy as one of a precision which 'adds value to truth', in two ways. The first of these is by selecting from the sometimes confusing detail of a memorial representation that which is significant in the context of the recollection in question, and so *worth* remembering, thus ensuring that the memory is functioning accurately in the sense of being faithful to what it is evoking, rather than just accurately representing the detail of it. The second way in which value is added is by recontextualising the emotional content of memory, to ensure its environmental fit, or appropriateness to the time of its recollection and also the future. In other words, memory's role, in an episodic context, is also to be faithful in the sense of ensuring the evolution of what was true of the remembered experience, or event, in the past into a present truth of it; one which is imbued with 'emotional salience', and can also direct future recollections of it. This seems to me particularly apposite in the case of catastrophe testimony, which often invokes memories of experiences which occurred years, or even decades, previously.

How, though, can we guard against a memory which has been reconstructed unwittingly distorting the past? Campbell concedes that there may be tensions between the demands of accuracy in a veridical sense, and faithfulness in the sense she portrays, which may sometimes be unresolvable. In other cases, she suggests, resolving the tension will depend on the rememberer's integrity, underpinned by the fact that she is accountable to others in the present for getting the past right. In that light, Campbell argues, the reconstructive quality of remembering, rather than undermining the possibility of accuracy and integrity of memory,

'opens up our attention to the nature and complexities of these virtues' (Campbell, 2006: 377).

5. 7 Summary

Preservationist and generativist accounts of the role and functionality of memory represent fundamentally opposed concepts of the nature, and workings, of memory, and I have not been able to identify any existing or proposed philosophical account of memory which plausibly unites both accounts in a manner which would both satisfy the retentionist requirements of Preservationists and embrace the adaptive, constructive, reconstructive, or simulationist notions of Generativists.

Contemporary psychologists and cognitive scientists, on the other hand, appear to be firmly in the generativist camp, as regards their understanding of the cognitive processes at work in relation to memory. To maintain a wholly, or largely, preservationist view of memory seems, therefore, to require discounting much empirical evidence from the fields of psychology and cognitive science regarding the workings of memory. It is not theoretically wholly implausible for philosophers and cognitive scientists to diverge conceptually in specific cases, since as Arieh Schwartz notes, psychologists and cognitive scientists account for mental states like memory in terms of human behaviour, whereas philosophical theorising generally addresses the role of memory in the context of knowledge acquisition, or justifying or warranting belief in the word of others (Schwartz, 2018: 11). Thus, for example, the distinction between someone 'seeming to remember', and 'remembering', which may be crucial to justifying testimony from an epistemological perspective is not necessarily important from a behavioural perspective.

Nevertheless, plausible philosophical theorising of a conceptual nature in fields which are also heavily populated by specialists from many other, more case- focused, disciplines, such as in the case of memory, and specifically the memory of traumatic experience, is difficult to achieve. Aviezer Tucker, for instance, argues that the kind of esoteric thought experiments espoused by epistemologists—those brains in the vats, and fake barns—are unnecessary in relation to explaining the workings of memory, because existing studies of memory by psychologists and cognitive scientists have already generated a large volume of specific data which can be used to settle epistemological debate in relation to the formation of beliefs from memory empirically and scientifically (Tucker, 2012: 417).

Consequently, for the purposes of this dissertation, I am following the generativist account of memory, though like Robins I am not inclined to forego the requirement for a retrieved memorial representation of an original experience to incorporate *some* concrete information relating to that experience. In other words, although I accept the generativist account of how memory works to produce a testimonial account of a past experience, as well as Huemer's phenomenal foundationalist account of how that representation might be *prima facie* justified, I also accept the epistemic argument made from their different perspectives by Robins and Senor, that this does not, *of itself*, warrant the ultimate unquestioning acceptance of whatever is produced from memory.

The above comments apply to catastrophe testimony as they do to any other form of testimony sourced in memory. The distinction between catastrophe testimony and other testimony is not conceptual; it lies, as I perceive it, in the nature of what is remembered (a past traumatic experience), and how it is remembered (the effect on the workings of the testifier's memory, for example, of trauma-related phenomena, such as post-traumatic stress syndrome). Whilst this may profoundly affect what is recollected, and represented as testimony from a testifier's perspective, though, the fact remains that a retrieved memory, from the perspective of the recipient, 'is what it is'. That is to say that, save in the case where there is other testimonial or background evidence available which might either corroborate or refute a testifier's account of a particular experience, or some clear evidence, within the testimony itself, of its untruthfulness, or unreliability, the recipient of his testimony may have no rational choice other than take the testifier's account of his experience at face value.

However, I contend that any fruitful reading of catastrophe testimony must involve reaching beyond the realms of epistemological enquiry, to address wider questions concerning the personal and social issues arising from the existential re-engagement between survivors of catastrophic experiences, and the world to which they return. Later in this dissertation, I develop this argument, focusing on particular challenges which face testifiers and those to whom their testimony is addressed, and especially the existential and moral chasm which catastrophe testimony illuminates, and also sometimes creates, between testifiers and their recipients (and societies more generally). Before attempting that task, however, I will need to examine more deeply the issue of what is known as 'traumatic

memory', namely the recollection and articulation of retrieved memories as catastrophic experiences.

CHAPTER 6. RECOLLECTING, AND EXTERNALISING MEMORIES OF VICTIMHOOD AND SURVIVAL: PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

6.1 Introduction

In the discussion of memory errors in Section 5.4 above, I noted de Brigard's suggestion that memory functions as part of a cognitive system for 'optimizing' representations of past events. Where the events in question are profoundly traumatic experiences, however, the question of what constitutes optimization might not be entirely straightforward. Does it , for instance, include the implementation of strategies for coping with psychological trauma, in which case might not forgetting or misremembering, constitute the 'optimal' strategy? And if, from a generativist perspective, retrieving memorial images for the purposes of testifying is an act of *producing* rather than *reproducing* memorial images of catastrophic experiences, does that mean that different images of the same past experience might be produced on different occassions depending on the context of the testimonial event – a hostile cross-examination in a courtroom, say, as opposed to a psychotherapeutic interview – or at different points in the survivor's life? Jean Améry, for example, described in his Preface to the first edition of *At the Mind's Limits* how difficult and traumatic just writing an unmediated autobiographical account of one's experience victimhood and survival can be, even twenty years after the event:

> For two decades I had been in search of the time which was impossible to lose, only it had been difficult for me to talk about it. Then, however, once a gloomy spell appeared to be broken by the writing of the essay on Auschwitz, suddenly everything demanded telling. That is how this book came about. At the same time, I discovered that while I had contemplated a good many questions, I had not articulated them with nearly enough clarity. Only in the process of writing did I recognize what it was that until then I had indistinctly caught sight of in half-conscious intellectual rumination and that hesitated at the threshold of verbal expression……Slowly and arduously, I had groped forward in what was familiar to a surfeit, but had remained alien nonetheless (Améry, 1999, Preface to the First Edition: xiii).

In fact, the post-traumatic recollection of images which may have been stored in the testifier's memory for years or even decades can represent a sometimes difficult

confrontation between the testifier and his former victim self. In Améry's case, for example, being commissioned to write and broadcast a series of essays on his existential condition as a victim and survivor required him to confront some difficult aspects of his own past, notably in his essay 'How Much Home Does a Person Need?', when he wrote of the inauthenticity of his rural Austrian childhood, and his essay 'On the Necessity and Impossibility of Being a Jew', when, as the title implies, he wrote of the existential dilemma of his post-traumatic identity.

Consequently, studying the existential condition of being a victim and especially a survivor of a catastrophic experience through catastrophe testimony is by no means a straightforward process. It involves much more than analysing a documentary account of the testifier's catastrophic experiences, or his or her subsequent life. A core aim of the remainder of this dissertation is therefore to both to follow, and hopefully illuminate as far as possible, that process.

6.2 Sources

Testimony relating to catastrophic experiences such as rape and other forms of sexual violence, torture, or collective persecution such as that experienced by prisoners in the Nazi concentration camps is readily available, abundant, and of a generally high quality. So great is the amount of existing testimony and commentaries on, or analyses of, testimony relating to the experiences of Holocaust survivors, for instance, that the production and dissemination of it has been fairly characterised as an 'industry'. Consequently, I do not suggest that the texts selected for this dissertation are in any sense representative of all available material; rather, my principal consideration in selecting them has been to choose testimony which I feel best illuminates the issues and arguments examined herein.

Catastrophe testimony exists in many forms, the main ones being evidence given in judicial or quasi-judicial proceedings, professionally witnessed testimony given to archival institutions, whether in writing, orally, or in the form of video testimony, 'trauma stories' elicited as part of a survivor's psychotherapeutic treatment, and the autobiographical memoirs of survivors. In this dissertation I will be mainly relying on testimony in the form of survivor memoirs, rather than in any dialogic form, on the grounds that, notwithstanding any issues of narrativity, and the lack of spontaneity of such testimony, accounts resulting from unmediated self-reflection ought to constitute, relatively speaking, the most authentic, and direct accounts of catastrophic experiences, and of the existential, psychological, and moral

condition of survival[27]. I say 'relatively speaking' because catastrophe testimony (and indeed trauma testimony more generally) in *any* form raises fundamental questions regarding the degree of correspondence between an original experience and the testimonial recollection of it, and between the testifier's phenomenal experience of trauma and her description of it. Relying principally on unmediated first person accounts also avoids the issues which can arise from mediated accounts, such as the extent to which such testimony speaks with the authentic voice of the testifier. Nevertheless, I will be taking very much into account of the perspectives of witnessing professionals in relation to the *interpretation* of survivor testimony.

The distinction between unmediated and mediated testimony, however, can be somewhat blurred. The most obvious examples are the accounts of survivors who have received prior psychotherapeutic treatment, as in the case of the testimony of Karyn L. Freedman examined in Chapter 8. However, the accounts of many more survivors may have been less directly, and whether consciously or unconsciously, mediated, for example as a result of what he or she has learned subsequently concerning the circumstances surrounding his or her experience, or similar experiences, and of course the testimony of every survivor is 'mediated' by their particular objective in testifying. Seeking the 'truth of the matter' from catastrophe testimony may thus depend to a large extent on what truth one seeks, and where one chooses to look for it. Nevertheless, I want to respect, insofar as this is possible, the 'sad privilege' which Améry claimed for survivors of being the only ones who will ever be able to spiritually relive the catastrophic event as it was, or picture how it could be again (Améry, 1999: 93).

6.3 Defining Catastrophe Testimony

The expression 'catastrophe testimony' as used in the following chapters of this dissertation refers to the testimony of survivors of experiences involving, as Judith Herman puts it, 'threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death', which 'confront human beings with the extremities of helplessness and terror, and evoke the responses of catastrophe' (Herman, 2015 [1992]; 33). These include grievous, and often

[27] Kenneth Waltzer notes, though, that as a Holocaust historian he often uses 'dialogic testimony in unguarded form' to test the truthfulness of what a survivor has written in a memoir of her experience, where this is feasible (Greenspan and others, 2014: 201).

sustained, or repeated, assaults deliberately inflicted by others, such as forced deportation, rape and other forms of serious sexual assault, torture, and those atrocities which occurred on a daily basis in the Nazi concentration camps and were largely intended to terrorise and physically and psychologically degrade their victims. Such actions are notable in being *aimed at* inflicting 'psychological blows, wounds to the spirit' as well as physical injury; notably terror, humiliation, degradation, fear of annihilation, and dehumanization (Hacking, 1995: 183). This wounding of the victim's spirit, like the physical injuries which accompany it, is also notable for its lasting nature. Améry, for example, recalled in 1965, that his experience of his torture was indelible; twenty-two years after the event, he said, he was still mentally 'dangling over the ground by dislocated arms, panting, and accusing myself', as he had been in 1943, in the torture room at Fort Breendonk. (Améry, 1999: 36).

Beyond this there is very little one can say in general terms about the phenomenal experience of being a victim or a survivor of a catastrophic occurrence; it is by its nature different for every testifier. One can nevertheless discern some apparent similarities between the descriptions given by testifiers of their experiences. Freedman's account of her experience as a rape survivor, and Améry's account of his experience as a survivor of torture, for example, record similar sensations of shame and humiliation at having been physically and mentally violated and overwhelmed in an intensely personal way, and at their own helplessness to prevent it. Améry's experience of imprisonment in Auschwitz, on the other hand, appears on the face of it quite different to that of Primo Levi, or Charlotte Delbo, but that may have more to do with their different objectives in testifying, and the proximity of their testimonies to the experiences they describe, rather than any significant differences in the experiences themselves. In fact Améry gives two very different accounts of his own experience of Auschwitz in different essays. In his 1964 essay 'At the Mind's Limits', written for broadcast to an audience of German intellectuals, and in the hope of some kind of re-engagement with them, he is determined to depict his fate primarily as one which had befallen him as an Austro- German intellectual who happened to be of part-Jewish descent, rather than a Jew; one who was being unjustly deprived of his cultural and intellectual heritage, and whose suffering had been felt most keenly in the destruction of his intellectual and philosophical foundations and beliefs. In his 1977 essay 'Being a Jew' (originally entitled 'Mein Judentum'), on the other hand, written specifically as a discourse on his conception of

his Jewishness, and not long before his suicide, Améry describes his experience of Auschwitz from the perspective of a Jewish 'common' prisoner in far more personal and visceral terms, focusing on the fate of Jewish prisoners as the 'slaves of slaves', and the brutality of their treatment not only by the SS guards but also other prisoners.

Consequently, my concentration on the testimony of Jewish survivors of Auschwitz in Chapter 9 is not intended to imply that their experiences represent some kind of paradigm as far as collective catastrophic experiences are concerned. In fact, the Jewish victims of the Third Reich were not even a homogenous social or cultural group. In Germany and other countries of Western Europe, one could find both highly assimilated, and largely secular, 'Western' Jews many of whom identified more strongly with their country than their religion, and more recently arrived, unassimilated both in appearance and customs, and mostly religiously orthodox 'Eastern' Jews, seeking refuge from persecution and economic deprivation in Russia and other parts of the Russian empire. Moreover, many Western Jews shared the distaste for and sense of alienation from Eastern Jews felt by non-Jews, and thus were wholly unprepared for and profoundly shocked by their own inclusion in the collective caricaturing of Jews as dangerous, subversive, Bolsheviks, or degenerate subhumans, by the National Socialist propaganda machine. Consequently, the success of that propaganda machine, in ultimately reducing many of them to self-identifying with the caricature fashioned by their persecutors, and thus appearing to some to have acquiesced to, or even collaborated in, their own destruction, is one of the truly extraordinary achievements of the National Socialist regime.

The seemingly endless fascination with the Holocaust is therefore understandable. Some have gone as far as to characterise it as a unique event in human history, but this is not a view I share. On the contrary, the fact that, as extraordinary as it might have been , it could nevertheless happen again, is, I believe, one major justification for continuing to study it not as an event in history, but rather as a means of contemplating the possibilities involved in being a victim and a survivor, or indeed a perpetrator, of such an experience .

6.4 Believing Catastrophe Testimony

What has been said in earlier chapters of this dissertation concerning the epistemological chasm between survivors of catastrophic experiences and the world, and also the workings of memory, has two implications as far as catastrophe testimony is concerned. The first is

that the epistemological foundations of testimony sourced from episodic memory may be less stable than that sourced from other epistemic sources, and the epistemological foundations of episodic memory sourced from traumatic experiences in all probability less stable than other kinds of episodic memory. The second implication is that if catastrophe testimony is to be accepted as a reliable and valuable source of knowledge about the world in a wider moral, socio-political, and cultural sense than that which is purely informational, grounds must be sought for believing such testimony beyond those which are acceptable in relation to the epistemological evaluation of information or propositional statements. It is the latter implication on which I focus in this Section.

The issue is whether and how we can seek grounds for accepting as true both propositional and non-propositional statements contained in catastrophe testimony, and specifically those statements about experiences which lie beyond our lived experience and understanding; for believing, that is, the incomprehensible. Are we entitled, for instance, to presume, say on the evidence of the Auschwitz number tattooed on the testifier's forearm, his trustworthiness as a witness to what happened to him, and others, in that place, and thus to deem his testimony to be at least *prima facie* true? Can we simply *choose* to believe catastrophe testimony, or as it is sometimes stated 'trust the testifier for the truth' of it, in circumstances where the reliability of the content of the testimony cannot, as a consequence of its extraordinary nature, either be non-inferentially assumed or inferentially tested as required by the epistemic methodologies previously examined? Or do we need some conceptual framework within which reliance on such testimony might be justifiably placed?

Jonas Ahlskog (2018), following the earlier work of B. McMyler (2011) concerning the justification of our belief in 'extraordinary' testimony, suggests that there might exist a quasi-epistemological framework in which we can the justify such beliefs. It is, suggests Ahlskog, essentially a matter of whether we can treat the testifier as an authority in relation to the subject matter of her testimony; if we can then we should be entitled to trust her for the truth of her utterances, notwithstanding any apparent improbability of its content. As Ahlskog acknowledges, this concept has its roots in the the Assurance View of testimonial justification discussed above. His 'AV Plus' variant essentially aims at underwriting the testifier's invitation to the recipient of her testimony to trust her for the truth in the case of extraordinary testimony (testimony 'which by definition tells of extraordinary and prima facie

highly unlikely actions and events') by the addition of a further assurance of her status as an authority in relation to the subject matter of her testimony. Ahlskog then goes on to develop this idea particularly in this context the testimony of Holocaust survivors.

As Ahlskog acknowledges, though, the key objection to his proposal lies in the question Paul Ricoeur (2004) asked: how can we come to believe what we cannot understand? If we have no grounds for relying on the deemed authority of a testifier save her deemed assurance what is its epistemic value? Ahlskog's response is that accepting the authority of the testifier permits us not to understand her experience, which we are not experientially equipped to do, but to increase our understanding of what is possible, from the greatest of evils to the extremes of goodness, in human interactions. To achieve this, however we have to be willing to trust the testifier for the truth of what might have previously seemed both extraordinary and implausible to the extent required to enable us to believe what we are told. (Ahlskog, 2018; 68-69). This argument is pragmatically and ethically attractive, but conceptually problematic. Firstly, it appears susceptible to objections of circularity - we justify our acceptance of the testifier's word by accepting her authority, and justify our acceptance of her authority in turn by the need to take her at her word. Secondly, we know that on a generativist account of memory, its cognitive processes are not necessarily aimed at preserving the factual truth of an experience; testimony which is authoritative may thus also be untrue in the sense of not corresponding factually with the original experience, for example if it is misremembered or memorially reconstructed. Ahlskog's thesis therefore seems to require an alternative definition of what constitutes truth. Thirdly, is accepting the authority of someone who is telling us things we cannot understand on account of the catastrophic nature of her experience anything more than a *moral choice,* in which case why would we need to justify it in epistemological terms?

Nevertheless, the important point which Ahlskog's thesis raises is whether, where our belief in testimony such as catastrophe testimony cannot be epistemically or empirically justified, we still need to make some intellectual effort to justify holding that belief. In other words , should we see belief in such testimony purely as a moral good – choosing to believe what we feel it is right to believe – or as both a moral and intellectual good? This was the point Améry had addressed some forty years earlier in his Preface to the Reissue of *Jenseits von Schuld und*

Sühne, when he declared that his readers should aim for a state of mind in contemplating his essays:

> [which]embraces more than just logical deduction and empirical verification, but rather, beyond these two, the will and the ability to speculate phenomenologically, to empathize, to approach the limits of reason……This is why, now as well as earlier, I always proceed from the concrete event, but never become lost in it; rather always take it as an occasion for reflections that extend beyond reasoning and pleasure in logical argument to areas of thought that lie in an uncertain twilight and will remain therein, no matter how much I strive to attain the clarity necessary in order to lend them contour….enlightenment is not the same as clarification. (ibid. : xi).

This is as clear a statement as I have found on the matter, and one I try to follow, however imperfectly, in this dissertation.

CHAPTER 7. TRAUMA, MEMORY, AND TESTIMONY VIEWED FROM THE OUTSIDE

7.1 Introduction

In Chapter 5 I examined the nature of memory, and especially episodic memory, as a source of testimony. In this Chapter I will take that examination a stage further, by focusing specifically on memory as the source of catastrophe testimony. As previously noted, the recovery, articulation and transmission of memories of traumatic experiences in the form of catastrophe testimony may occur in a number of different ways, and environments, and some of these involve the participation of those with a specific professional interest in what the testifier has to say. One obvious example is testimony given as evidence in judicial proceedings, usually in relation to the prosecution of an alleged perpetrator of a crime. Another is testimony given to interviewers in specialist archival institutions established for the collection and study of such testimony. The most valuable form of such mediated testimony, though, from the perspective of revealing the psychopathology of trauma and survival is the 'trauma story' - the survivor's account of his or her traumatic experience and survival, produced with the assistance of a professional witness - which has been a key element of the treatment process for those suffering from post-traumatic psychological disorders for many years. Published accounts of the production of such testimony, either in the form commentaries by witnesses, studies of such commentaries, or sometimes the accounts of survivors themselves, have also been extensively used as source material by professionals from a range of disciplines with an interest in the particular events recorded in the testimony in question, and/or the psychology or phenomenology of traumatic experience, including catastrophe testimony , more generally.

The process of getting survivors to tell their own trauma stories, in tandem with diagnosing and treating their psychological disorders, and where possible setting them on the road to recovery, though, is a complex, and often extended one. Evaluating testimony produced in a psychotherapeutic setting should therefore ideally involve not only evaluating the testimony itself, but also of the process by which it was developed, and if possible the role played by the therapist or other witnessing professionals in its production. This task is realistically beyond the vast majority of recipients of such testimony, and this obviously impacts in turn on the issue of how recipients can justifiably rely on such testimony. In this Chapter I endeavour, *inter alia*, to illuminate that issue within the framework of this dissertation. To

begin with, though, I will briefly review the origins of the study of traumatic memory as a phenomenon, and something of the process by which it is accessed in a clinical environment.

7.2 Origins and Development of the Clinical Concept of Traumatic Memory

The notion that traumatic experiences might induce psychological as well as physical trauma originated in Paris during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and was already in circulation when Freud arrived there to study in 1885. It was focused around the study of episodic amnesia, that is the idea that experiences which had caused damage to the brain in a physical or neurological sense could also produce psychological symptoms, such as hysterical amnesia - loss of memory of the experience caused by the shock to the brain induced by the trauma. This was generally seen at the time as a condition largely suffered by women which could be treated by hypnosis which, if successful, would allow the lost memory to be recovered (Hacking, 1995:183). Modern studies of the problems of lost memory from a clinical perspective, and more recently from a philosophical perspective, however, notes Hacking, have centred on the possibility of a traumatic experience, being *reinterpreted* in memory (as discussed in Chapter 5). (ibid: 192).

The modern discourse concerning psychological trauma has its immediate origins not in study of the traumatic experiences, or memories, of women, but rather those of veterans of the Vietnam War, and more specifically the psychological disorder now commonly known as post-traumatic stress disorder , or PTSD. PTSD first appeared as a recognised category of mental disorder in this context, notes Judith Herman, in the official manual of the American Psychiatric Association in 1980. However, she adds, the Women's Liberation Movement had, since the 1970s, also been pressing for the clinical recognition of the post-traumatic disorders suffered by female victims of sexual violence and domestic abuse, not only with the objective of highlighting their plight and pressing for the treatment of individual victims, but also in order to of bring about changes in the social and legal categorisation of such acts. The Movement's aim was to raise the general level of consciousness of the sexual abuse of women, to eliminate the social pressures on them to deny, keep secret, or feel ashamed about, their experiences, and ultimately to remove the barriers imposed by victims on themselves against revealing, and bearing witness to, their experiences. Thus rape became redefined as a crime of violence, and 'rape trauma syndrome' recognised as a pattern of psychological reactions to having been raped. Additionally, acts of violence perpetrated not

only by strangers but also by persons known to the victim came to be recognised as potentially constituting criminal offences, such as date rape, marital rape, and other forms of assault or coercive behaviour. This, in turn, led to similar work being undertaken in relation to the sexual, physical, and psychological abuse of children, whose sufferings have become increasingly highlighted, in recent years (Herman, 2015:27-31). Herman sees the clinical study of traumatic memory as being driven by these social and political initiatives, but Hacking argues that the political movements Herman describes actually latched on to existing scientific enquiry into memory in order to legitimize their political arguments, for example in relation to PTSD (Hacking, 1995: 213). In any event, it seems agreed that the study of traumatic memory has in recent years been marked by the interaction of science and politics.

7.3 Unlocking Traumatic Memories: The Role and Challenges of Psychotherapeutic Intervention

Retrieving and externalising memories of catastrophic experiences, whether as a mediated or unmediated process, involves a huge psychological, moral and existential investment on the part of the testifier in being believed. It requires the recovery of memories of experiences of a profoundly traumatic nature, which the survivor may find shameful, and humiliating, and the recollection of which he or she may have previously suppressed or at least decided should remain unarticulated, over a period of years, or even decades. Further, it requires those recovered memories to be rendered intelligible, in the vast majority of cases to those who will never have experienced anything remotely similar to the experience in question. Even if the testifier can overcome these challenges, though, he or she is faced with a real possibility that his or her testimony will be disbelieved - characterised as irrational, unreliable, or even incredible, especially by those who seek 'epistemic-grade' justification of its contents, such as lawyers and historians. In this light testifying, as part of a psychotherapeutic process in which the therapist's role is specifically to assist and support the testifier, might reasonably be seen as offering not only a relatively psychologically benign means of testifying, but also one which might be conducive to producing an accurate and reliable, hence trustworthy, account of the testifier's experiences.

However, whilst this assumption may often be justified, commentators concede that the participation of the therapist as a disinterested, yet supportive, witnessing professional is by no means a given (see, for example, Herman, 2015, Hacking, 1995, and McKinney, 2007). It

may, for example, be undermined not only as a result of the therapist's natural emotional involvement with her patient's trauma story, but also from the political or social attitudes, or clinical beliefs she may hold. Judith Herman, for instance, examines at length one of the most important manifestations of a therapist's *unhelpful* emotional involvement in her patient's trauma - 'traumatic countertransference' - in which the therapist becomes overwhelmed emotionally by the patient's story, and starts experiencing some of the terror, rage, or despair of the patient, or even symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, such as nightmares, or a feeling of helplessness. She cites cases of therapists working with Holocaust survivors being "engulfed by anguish", or "sinking into despair", to the extent of having to withdraw from the therapeutic process entirely, which may in turn adversely affect the testifier's own psychic state. More worryingly, she cites other cases of therapists beginning to identify with the *perpetrator* by becoming highly sceptical of the patient's story, minimising or rationalising the abuse suffered by him, , or even experiencing voyeuristic excitement, such as sexual arousal, at his account of it. Another form of countertransference commonly cited in reports of those working with Holocaust survivors, Herman found, is 'witness guilt' - a sense of guilt at being spared the patient's suffering, or a feeling of having displayed insufficient zeal, or commitment in helping the patient (Herman, 2015: 140-147).

Examples of pre-existing social, or political attitudes influencing the therapist's analysis or treatment of her patient's traumatic disorder can be found, it seems, particularly in the cases of sexual or domestic violence towards women, and the treatment of psychiatric disorders experienced by combat veterans. They are also exemplified, observes Kelly McKinney, in the 'sanctification' of the trauma memories of Jewish survivors of the Holocaust by clinicians in the United States and Israel, which she contrasts with the less emotionally responsive attitude of recipients of the testimony of survivors of other cases of collective violence, for example in Africa. (McKinney, 2007: 288-9). Finally, a therapist may also be predisposed by her adherence to particular clinical hypotheses or explanations of the behaviour of patients with generically similar disorders to that of the subject patient to diagnose their disorder in a manner which is consistent with the favoured hypothesis or explanation.

Karyn L. Freedman, herself a survivor of a violent rape and a recipient of psychotherapeutic treatment, whose story is examined in Chapter 8, also underlines the danger for therapists in

failing to recognise the distinction between two sides of the post-traumatic condition of survivors of catastrophic experiences. The first she calls the 'shattered self' - the intense personal suffering occasioned by the traumatic experience which impacts on the emotional, psychological, and physiological wellbeing of the survivor. The second is what she calls the 'shattered world view' (which Améry referred to as his 'loss of trust in the world') - the loss of belief in the world as a just and safe place. ' For the survivor', says, Freedman, 'the idea that the world is basically safe is, like a Popperian conjecture, falsified in one bold test' (Freedman, 2010:78). Whilst symptoms of the shattered self, she notes, typically evidence a disordered psychological condition from which the therapist should aim to help her patient recover, the survivor's shattered world view should not necessarily be seen in the same light. In fact, the survivor's experience may have actually resulted in the survivor holding a *greater* proportion of 'well-ordered' (non-accidentally true) beliefs concerning the world than before. A female survivor of a violent sexual attack, for example, may have more realistic beliefs about sexual violence towards women generally than before she was attacked, thus making her 'shattered world view' not only *not* disordered, but actually both more epistemically reliable, *and* more morally justifiable than her former 'just world' view (ibid. :79). Freedman's argument echoes the more visceral response of Jean Améry, forty five years earlier, in his essay *Resentments* (1965). After noting that those Holocaust survivors suffering from post traumatic disorders had been described as "warped" in a recent psychoanalytical publication, Améry retorted that his 'warped state' constituted 'a form of the human condition that morally as well as historically is of a higher order than that of healthy straightness' (Améry, 1999: 68).[28] As R.D. Laing famously pointed out in relation to schizophrenia, a seemingly 'warped' state of mind might actually represent a sane reaction to an insane world.

Thus, whilst a clinically mediated 'trauma story' may be more intelligible than one told in the patient's own unmediated language, it may also be one which to some extent reflects the therapist's reading of the testifier's state of mind, rather than a story told in the patient's own words. Though clinically well-informed, such mediated testimony may not necessarily reflect a total understanding of what the patient is actually struggling to articulate. In his book *Rewriting the Soul*, Ian Hacking expresses this point in more philosophical terms when

[28] These comments concern psychiatric analyses which were made long before the identification and psychological studies of PTSD were initiated, and at a time when the attitude to survivors of the Nazi concentration camps in Germany remained often unsympathetic, if not openly hostile.

he warns against attempting to 'rewrite the soul' of victims of traumatic experiences by treating the analysis of their retrieved memories of their experiences solely as objects of scientific enquiry. This, he argues, whilst disproving one misconception of the human soul as an object of religious contemplation, risks replacing it with another misconception of the human soul as 'something of which we have knowledge' (Hacking, 1995: 251).

7.4 Clinical Analysis of the Post- Traumatic Condition

'The salient characteristic of the traumatic event', writes Judith Herman, 'is its power to inspire helplessness and terror'. She characterises the symptoms of post- traumatic stress disorder in victims of sexual violence and combat veterans as falling into three main categories. The first is 'hyperarousal' - the persistent expectation of danger. The second is 'intrusion' - the constant reliving of the traumatic event as an abnormal form of memory which spontaneously breaks into consciousness as vivid sensations and images without a narrative frame, for instance as flashbacks during waking states, or nightmares during sleep. The third category is 'constriction' - dissociative splitting off of traumatic memory from normal consciousness, so that only selected fragments of the experience are retained in memory. Intrusion and constriction, she says, together form a 'dialectic of trauma', in which the subject's mind oscillates between the extremes of reliving the trauma and amnesia, or intense emotional responses and lack of emotion. This instability in turn heightens the subject's sense of the unpredictability and helplessness of his condition, making the dialectic of trauma potentially self-perpetuating.

Like Freedman, Herman highlights what she terms *disconnection* as a particular salient characteristic of PTSD; that is the loss of the subject's autonomy, or 'sense of self', on the one hand, and the loss of trust in the world as a safe place on the other, leaving the survivor feeling abandoned by, and alienated from, society. Herman notes how rape survivors, in particular, suffer this sense of disconnection on both levels ,experiencing high levels of PTSD both due to the 'physical, psychological and moral violation of the person' they have suffered, which was specifically designed to terrorise, dominate, humiliate, and render them helpless, and also as a result the social effects of the not uncommon disjunction between the survivor's actual experience of being raped, and the communal perception of what constitutes rape, as a social or criminal reality.

7.5 Traumatic Experiences in Captivity

Herman considers those who have undergone repeated traumatic experiences as a consequence of being held in captivity as a particular category of trauma victims. She points out that whilst those held in prisons, or concentration and slave labour camps, are obvious examples of victims in this category, captivity may also be the *de facto* condition of those who may appear, on the surface, to be at liberty, such as followers of some cults, sex workers, or victims of domestic violence. She appears to have in mind, though, principally situations in which there is prolonged one-to-one contact between the perpetrator and the victim, leading to a relationship of coercive control, in which the perpetrator seeks the *willing* submission of the victim (and is thus to some extent in turn psychologically dependent on him or her). Nevertheless, whatever the relationship between the victims and perpetrator(s), prolonged periods of captivity in which psychological trauma is experienced repeatedly, and in a variety of ways, clearly intensify that trauma. As Herman points out, repeated acts of violence, and especially violence which is unpredictable, or inconsistently applied, is the universal method of terrorising and dominating the victim in any situation of captivity. It instils in the victim both a fear of death, and a sense of gratitude towards the perpetrator for being allowed to live, and where accompanied by the perpetrator's control of the victim's bodily functions, such as eating, sleeping, going to the toilet, or exercising, erodes, and may ultimately destroy, the victim's sense of autonomy. The victim's only means of maintaining her autonomy in such a situation, notes Herman, may then lie in a refusal to comply, particularly where that refusal requires the victim to subject herself to greater deprivation than that willed by his or her captor, such as a hunger strike. In the absence of such a will to resist, however, the process of psychological degradation can ultimately result in the loss of the victim's basic will to live, as in the case of the Nazi concentration camp 'musulman' - the 'living dead' prisoner described by Primo Levi, Elie Wiesel, and others, who ceases to make any effort to find food, keep warm or avoid beatings, until death finally claims him. This state of submission, Herman emphasises, is not synonymous with that of a person who attempts to kill themselves in captivity; suicide attempts may indeed be acts of *resistance*, and defiance, expressed in the willingness to die by one's own hand rather than that of others. This view of suicide as an expression of free will, and an affirmation of dignity, especially where committed

in contemplation of being killed, is supported by Aharony, who notes that the SS were often extremely irritated by incidences of suicide in the Nazi concentration camps, regarding it, like an attempt to escape, as in effect a threat to the rules and objectives of the camp (Aharony, 2015: 134).

The intensity, and profundity of the psychological trauma suffered by victims during captivity, Herman found, subsequently manifested itself in chronic forms of PTSD, both physically, in amplified forms of hyperarousal such as headaches, back pain, or gastrointestinal disturbances, and also socially, in the avoidance of personal relationships and other forms of social and emotional engagement, and 'the over-development of a solitary inner life' (Herman, 2015: 87). Techniques of disassociation and 'trance states' learned in captivity to restrict or suppress physical or psychological suffering might continue to be practised by survivors, for example in a refusal to discuss the past even with spouses or children, as Herman consistently found to be the case with survivors of Nazi concentration camps. Such techniques, however, far from erasing the traumatic memories of the past, leave survivors, she says, with a 'double consciousness': a 'hazy and dulled' present, and an 'intense and clear' past, the reality of which seems more compelling than that of the present. As a result, survivors may develop a 'contaminated identity' - one preoccupied with shame, self-loathing, and a sense of failure, and marked by protracted periods of depression - but also anger reflecting the 'humiliated rage' previously felt but suppressed as a prisoner, and directed by the survivor against others, but sometimes also against himself.

The survivor's sense of estrangement from the world around him may be intensified as a result of the way in which others judge his role during captivity. Most people who have no knowledge or understanding of the psychological effect of captivity, Herman says, tend to judge chronically traumatised survivors extremely harshly, becoming frustrated with the symptoms they display, condemning their betrayal of any friendships, loyalties, or moral values they may have been compelled to betray, and commonly ascribing their behaviour to flaws or weaknesses in their character. 'The propensity to fault the character of the victim', notes Herman, 'can be seen even in the case of politically organized mass murder', for instance in talk of the alleged 'passivity' of Jewish victims of the Holocaust, and alleged complicity in their fate, as notoriously alleged, by, *inter alios*, Raul Hilberg, Hannah Arendt and Zygmunt Bauman (ibid. :115). This tendency, she claims, has also strongly influenced the

direction of psychological inquiry, leading clinicians to seek explanations for perpetrator actions in the victim's alleged personality 'defects', such as a propensity to be brainwashed, and consequently to misdiagnose post-traumatic syndromes as attributable to the victim's presumed underlying psychopathology rather than the nature or extent of the traumatic injury inflicted by the perpetrator.

7.6 Testimony as Psychotherapeutic Process

The production of the survivor's own account of her trauma is central to the recovery programme Herman describes for the treatment of PTSD. The aim is to get the survivor to tell the story of her trauma in order that her traumatic memory of it can be integrated into her own narrative of her life. The fundamental premise of this process is a belief in the 'restorative power of truth-telling' (Herman, 2015:181).

Herman describes two therapeutic techniques for getting survivors to produce their trauma story. The first technique she calls 'direct exposure', or 'flooding', which is 'designed to overcome the terror of the traumatic event by exposing the patient to a controlled reliving experience' (ibid.). The patient is first taught anxiety management/relaxation techniques , following which a detailed written 'script' of each relevant traumatic event is prepared and narrated aloud by the patient to the therapist, with the process being repeated as required in subsequent sessions. The second technique is the 'testimony method', which involves making verbatim transcripts of the patient's account of her experience, to create a detailed and extensive narrative which the patient and therapist then revise together into a coherent testimony that the patient might then read aloud, and which both patient and therapist formally 'sign off' as party and witness respectively. Herman notes that the testimony method is a more socially and politically developed process than the more narrowly focused 'flooding' method, and thus more useful to third parties such as human rights organisations, but she claims that both methods have been shown to produce positive results in successfully relieving post-traumatic symptoms of hyperarousal and intrusion, though not those of social disconnection. Neither method, however, she says, may be adequate for treating cases of chronic abuse, especially where the patient has major gaps in her memory. Moreover, since both methods are designed to treat each traumatic event separately, they may be impractical for treating survivors of prolonged or repeated abuse.

Even where it is carefully and professionally guided, says Herman, the production of the trauma story 'inevitably plunges the survivor into profound grief', and initiates a process of mourning which is 'at once the most necessary, and the most dreaded task of this stage of recovery' (ibid. :188). Resistance to mourning is thus to be expected and is one of the most common causes of stagnation in this stage of recovery. It is motivated not only by fear, but sometimes also pride—the sense that resistance to grieving will deny the perpetrator his victory. Resistance may take the form of various fantasies of 'magical resolution', such as the revenge fantasy, in which the survivor imagines the roles of the perpetrator and herself as the victim being reversed, the forgiveness fantasy, in which the survivor pictures herself erasing the psychic impact of the trauma through a 'willed defiant act of love', and the compensation fantasy, in which the survivor imagines herself being offered some form of material or social 'compensation' by the perpetrator. All such fantasies, claims Herman, are therapeutically fruitless attempts at self-empowerment.

The last stage of the recovery process Herman describes is the reconnection of the survivor to the world of the present. She favours incorporating into this process 'public truth-telling' - the revelation of the survivor's experience to others, within a larger framework of human rights, or social justice advocacy - though she concedes that this can be psychologically hazardous for the survivor. It may well involve confronting perpetrators, and others who wish, from whatever motive, to discredit the survivor's account of her experience, and as Herman pointed out in her (1997) afterword to her book, even if the perpetrators or discreditors cannot succeed in this, they may succeed in nullifying the consequences of testifiers being believed. She cites the example of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, discussed in Chapter 10, in which the perpetrators were able to demand amnesty from prosecution as the price of truthfulness, and other cases in Eastern Europe where the complicity of whole communities in war crimes rendered criminal action against individual perpetrators and their collaborators practically impossible. I would add that the judicial process itself may also prove both unsatisfactory and hazardous. In post-war Germany, for example, the efforts of survivor witnesses to help prosecute Nazi war criminals in German municipal courts, such as in the Frankfurt trial of former Auschwitz personnel (1963-5) exposed survivors to intimidating attacks by defence counsel on their credibility as witnesses, permitted by the court as legitimate cross-examination The proceedings also

proved inadequate in delivering justice, due to the fact that the only criminal offences under which perpetrators could be prosecuted under German law were those of murder or accessory to murder (Wittman, 2005, Pendas,2006). Consequently, the potential personal cost to the survivors of having to endure assaults on their character or credibility as witnesses, including allegations of mental instability, or of being brainwashed by others, including psychotherapists, should be carefully weighed against the expected benefit to them or of their giving evidence, as well as the value of the evidence itself.

Although, the treatment model described by Herman has been very widely adopted, it is not universally acclaimed. Kelly McKinney (2007) notes that in the early 2000s some clinicians began to question whether therapies which rely on verbalizing traumatic memory were in fact therapeutically efficacious, or whether they might actually exacerbate the narrator's traumatic stress. A major focus of McKinney's own study focuses on the work of clinicians treating victims of collective violence, such as genocidal actions, ethnic conflicts, forced migration, or torture. She addresses in particular the problem of clinicians who 'subordinate the social needs of clients to the ethical call to bear witness' and as a result fall prey to an ideology that 'casts clients as innocent victims, paradoxically denying a sense of their full moral and psychological agency rather than restoring it' (McKinney, 2007: 266-7). What she describes, in short, is a clinical iteration of what we will encounter in other contexts as a wider problem of 'hearing' catastrophe testimony, namely that of succumbing to the temptation to objectify, or instrumentalise the testifier, and/or his testimony in order to render it socially comprehensible or convenient.

McKinney links this distortive tendency most closely to those working with Jewish Holocaust survivors who succumb to what Dominick La Capra calls the 'grid of victimization', in which 'psychological, moral, and political ambiguity and complexity are eliminated by purifying and idealizing victims and demonizing and othering perpetrators' (ibid. :285). She describes three elements identified by La Capra in this structure. The first is the denial or disavowal of aggressive victim fantasies such as revenge fantasies which contradict the idealized picture of the victim as pure and innocent. Such denial, suggests McKinney, amounts to a denial of the victim's human subjectivity. The second is the rejection of the notion of survivor testimony being evaluable in terms of its accuracy or inaccuracy, in favour of accepting such testimony at face value, despite clinicians knowing that traumatic memory is in reality both

psychologically constructed and socially mediated. The third element is the 'sacralization' of trauma; that is the characterisation of the experiences of victims as intrinsically inassimilable and unrepresentable, and of testifiers as 'sanctified' persons, and their testimonies as a kind of sacred text. However, not only can the grid of victimization obviously not be applied where the victim is also a perpetrator, as in the case of many Vietnam war veterans who themselves committed crimes against others, it must be questionable whether it can be universally applied even within a Holocaust context. Can it, for example, be applied to victims who collaborated, however unwillingly, in the deeds of perpetrators, such as the Auschwitz and Nazi death camp *Sonderkommando* squad members ?[29]

McKinney thus concludes that whilst the 'trauma story' technique, properly employed, helps to make sense of the victim's suffering by contextualising it, and placing it within a collective socio-political or historical context, therapists who employ it but succumb to those tendencies which promote a 'grid of victimization' may end up denying, rather than honouring, the moral and psychological agency of their patients, and hindering, rather than aiding, their recovery.

Henry Greenspan, a psychologist specializing in interviewing Holocaust survivors, argues that two distinct and contradictory ways of looking at Holocaust survivors have in fact evolved since the 1970s, especially in the United States: a 'ceremonial' or 'ongoing life' rhetoric in which survivors are celebrated and honoured as heroes, and a 'psychiatric' or 'ongoing death' rhetoric, in which they are treated as 'ghosts and wrecks'. Greenspan sees both these rhetorical treatments as having evolved as separate and self-sufficient discourses which have become increasingly detached not only from each other, but also from remembering the Holocaust. Ceremonialists who invite survivors to 'bear witness', Greenspan suggests, are in fact abstracting the *act* of testifying from the testimony itself, and focusing on celebrating it, whilst leaving the content of the testimony in the background. Adherents of the psychiatric

[29] I am not suggesting that *Sonderkommando* members should be classed as perpetrators. My point is rather that their situation represents clear evidence of the falsity of assuming that all victims should be classified *ipso facto as* 'pure and innocent'. As I have suggested earlier in this dissertation, the fact is that Jewish Sonderkommando members were forced to fulfil the role which both made them collaborators and intensified their own victimisation in a particularly inhuman way. McKinney also cites the interesting case of a child soldier being admitted to a programme for the treatment of victims in which she participated as an observer, despite the fact that the programme staff normally refused to accept perpetrators. His acceptance was justified by those treating him on the grounds that he had been a child (coded as innocent and pure) at the time of committing the atrocities (ibid. :290).

model, on the other hand, he contends, abstract the survivor's emotional problems resulting from the a traumatic experience from the personal and historical content of the experience itself by designating them generically as post-traumatic 'symptoms' (Greenspan, 1999: 59). Consequently, whilst he accepts that the general 'blunt and undisguised' refusal to listen to survivors' stories of their experiences in the years following the end of the Second World War and prior to the 1970s makes one feel indignant in retrospect, it did, he suggests, at least 'reflect a genuine dread and revulsion in the face of the Holocaust.' rather than being merely an accepted clinical practice. The terror and guilt evoked by the Holocaust, if it could not be faced, had to be denied, and its messengers silenced by excluding them from the discourse. (ibid. :56). These observations, though, should be read in the specifically American context in which they were written; they would not, for example, apply to the reception of Holocaust testimony in Germany or Eastern Europe. Greenspan also suggested more recently that video testimonies recorded by archival institutions, in which the testifier is 'center-screen', and the interviewer deliberately off-camera, can sometimes evolve into performative monologues, in which the testifier self-consciously makes statements 'for the record' or 'for posterity'. He accepted, though, that video testimonies do have the advantage of permitting viewers to observe the testifier's body language as well as his verbal or written language, albeit usually in an edited form. Greenspan himself advocates a model of interviewing survivors characterized by multiple interviews carried out over a sometimes prolonged period of time, in which earlier interviews can be revisited in later interviews, so that an 'evolving evaluatory partnership' between testifier and interviewer can be fostered (Greenspan et al. , 2014:190).

7.7 Psychological Analysis in a Wider Philosophical Context

The conclusion I draw from the various commentaries cited above, in summary, is that whilst the production of narrative accounts of their experiences by those undergoing psychotherapeutic treatment can be an essential tool in the analysis and treatment of their psychological disorders, such an account may not be accurate either in the sense of corresponding with the facts of the subject's original experience, or in the sense of correspondence with the pre-therapeutic phenomenal content of that experience. Further, the degree to which the content of such an account may consciously or unconsciously reflect the input of the witnessing professional into its production, for example in the language and concepts employed by the subject to characterise his experience, or his perception of his

psychological condition, is probably unknowable. The fact, though, is that the purpose of psychoanalysis is to explore the nature of specific psychic disorders, and the purpose of psychotherapy within that context is to facilitate the treatment and recovery of a particular patient, and if possible his reintegration into society. Thus testimony in the form of a 'trauma story' is a means to a therapeutic end, and one which is not necessarily consistent with the objectives of testifying as a means of bearing witness in an evidential sense to the past experience or event . Consequently, one can neither presume that 'therapeutically induced' testimony will be more reliable, or trustworthy than testimony which is presented by the testifier in an unmediated form, such as a radio broadcast, an unmediated video recording, or a written autobiography, nor that it offers a better means of gaining an insight into what Hacking calls the 'soul' of the survivor.[30]

Hacking's study of the issues raised by the analysis and treatment of post-traumatic psychological disorders, though specifically directed at the treatment of multiple personality disorders, offers a broadly focused and enlightening perspective on the nature of traumatic memory. Its starting point is the endorsement of the generativist notion that in memory, 'we rearrange and modify elements that we seem to remember into something that makes sense ……We touch up, supplement, delete, combine, interpret, shade' (Hacking, 1995; 247). More than this, however, Hacking endorses 'the old and valuable Freudian insight' that the scenes we recover from our memories, perhaps some time after their original occurrence, may become invested with meanings which they may not have had at the time they were experienced. We may, for example, remember at a later date what we might have considered at the time of its occurrence as a minor act of flirting as constituting a more serious act of sexual harassment. Moreover, the more retroactively we ascribe such meanings, suggests Hacking, the more likely it becomes that the culture, language and norms we are applying at the time of recollection will be different from those which would have applied at the time the event occurred. Consequently, he declares, whilst it may be morally permissible, to use later terminology to characterise earlier events we should at the same time always take into account what he calls the 'indeterminacy of human action' in the past, that is our

[30] Hacking's analysis is written in the context of his study of multiple personality disorder, but raises many issues which are of value and importance in the context of post-traumatic psychological disorders more generally, particularly those of a wider nature than those addressed in predominantly clinical analyses.

potential conceptual inability to remember a past action in the same way as it appeared to us at the time.

A particular danger Hacking identifies is what he calls 'contagion by words' or 'semantic contagion' - the use by clinicians of contemporary generic terms, such as 'child abuse', to 'restore', as a painter might restore a faded picture, the patient's images of past actions. Such attempts at restoration, he notes, whilst often beneficial, should not amount to repainting old images with entirely new colours from the therapist's narrative palette rather than that of the patient (ibid. :254-5). That would risk offering the patient a new narrative, into which the patient might then fit his experiences, and whilst that may result in a more satisfying outcome in terms of the patient's happiness, capacity for social interaction, increased confidence, or reduced terror, it might be at the expense of falsifying his recollection of his past experience A difficult dialectical dilemma might thus arise between truth and morality; that of whether, if the patient's outcome can be improved by such means, the psychological benefit to the patient of such an improvement should matter more than whether or not the patient remembers his past, or his former self, truthfully. Hacking's commentary thus to some extent foreshadows some of the later discourse on the generativist concept of memory examined in Chapter 5.

From the perspective of analysing and treating multiple personality disorder, Hacking treats the issue of false memory as a particular aspect of a wider phenomenon of 'false consciousness'—the state of someone who has formed importantly false beliefs about his own character. In the case of false memory, this might take the form of ' remembering' things in the past which never occurred, radically reworking one's memory of events which did occur, or suppressing memories of things from one's past which are central to one's character or nature. Clinically induced or aided false consciousness, Hacking argues, is a morally undesirable condition, whoever is responsible for it, and whether or not it can be justified in terms of its outcomes from a clinical or utilitarian viewpoint, because it transgresses, *inter alia*, the idea of autonomy – that is the idea that 'we are responsible for constructing our own moral selves' (ibid. :264). Self-knowledge, he contends, should be considered a virtue in its own right, and a means by which we can fulfil our own natures by gaining 'an unsentimental self-understanding', though it may not make us as happy as living with a false consciousness of the past. The concern that therapy can be an impediment to autonomy by potentially

distorting our knowledge, or understanding, of our own nature - causing, as it were, collateral damage to one's sense of self - seems to me to echo, in a broader and demedicalized context concerns expressed in different ways in the commentaries of Herman and McKinney. To say, however, that a state self-knowledge is *necessarily* more desirable, or of a higher moral order, than that of a false consciousness of a profoundly traumatic experience which assists a patient in her recovery from that experience, seems to me to be making a very bold statement.

Hacking does not argue, on the other hand, that autobiographical accounts of people's lives are necessarily more closely connected with the reality of the experiences they describe than mediated life stories. On the contrary, when it comes to the language we use to *describe ourselves*, he suggests, 'each of us is a half-breed of imagination and reality' (ibid.:233). In fact, Hacking argues, the best analogy to autobiographical remembering is storytelling: 'We constitute our souls by making up our lives, that is by weaving stories about our past, by what we call memories-----[whose] real role is the creation of a life, a character, a self' (ibid. :250-1). The point is that, unlike in the case of mediated 'trauma stories', in the case of autobiographical works it is the biographer who has the sole responsibility for making up her life, and the process is thus autonomous.

7.8 Trauma Testimony and Evidential Value

Hacking's critique of psychotherapeutic practices highlights, *inter alia*, two important ethical issues. The first of these, discussed above, is the extent to which the narrative accounts by subjects of their traumatic experiences are, or should be, shaped by the therapist. The second is the extent to which a balance can be struck more generally between preserving the authenticity and perceptual value of a survivor's unmediated account of her traumatic experiences of victimhood and survival, on the one hand, and benefiting from the enhanced evidential value which might accrue from their analysis or interpretation by professionally interested third parties, such as a psychologists or historians on the other. It is particularly pertinent in the case of Holocaust testimony, due to the enormous quantity of professionally witnessed testimonial material which has been obtained from survivors through various kinds of mediation, especially where it has been subsequently made available for general study by third parties, but it can apply equally to any other catastrophe testimony which has been similarly obtained. However, I would argue that the issue of how far, and for what purposes,

catastrophe testimony should be reinterpreted by third parties is even wider and more important than that of professional mediation; it is both ethical and epistemological and it should be of interest to anyone who listens to or reads catastrophe testimony with more than a passing interest in a good story well told. I have found the insights of Dori Laub to be particularly valuable in addressing this issue, because although his observations were made from a clinical perspective, he was also himself a Holocaust survivor. Laub, who died in 2018, was not only a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, but also a co-founder of the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, at Yale University, for which institution he witnessed the testimonies of a number of survivors as an interviewer and analyst. In addition, he was a child survivor of various concentration camps in Romanian-occupied Ukraine[31] to which he was first deported, with his family, in 1942, at the age of five, and from which he was finally liberated, with his mother, in 1944.

In his essay 'Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening' (1992(a)) Laub states that the mental state of a survivor such as a Holocaust survivor who breaks his or her silence concerning a massively traumatic past experience by speaking of it in the presence of a witness such as himself is one of profound fearfulness, since revealing what he or she knows will break down 'all boundaries of time and place, of self and subjectivity'. Silence may have been the survivor's prison, but it was also his or her sanctuary. 'The fear that fate will strike again is crucial to the memory of trauma, and to the inability to talk about it', says Laub. Breaking her silence invokes a fear in the testifier that the catastrophic experiences from which he or she has been hiding will come to life and be relived, 'only this time around, one might not be spared nor have the power to endure' (Laub, 1992(a): 67). This, says Laub, is no idle fear; Paul Celan, Jean Améry, Tadeusz Borowski, Primo Levi, and Bruno Bettelheim may be among the more well known figures who paid with their lives for telling their trauma stories, but there have been very many others. Telling, says Laub, also invokes a fear of not being heard. He cites the recurring nightmare Primo Levi recalled having suffered in Auschwitz, of telling the story of the horrors of his life in the camp to his sister, and others, but finding they were not listening to him - indeed were completely indifferent to his story, and continued speaking of other things between themselves, as if he wasn't there, until finally

[31] Laub was born in Chernivsti, also known as Czernowitz under Austrian rule and Cernauti under Romanian rule, which is also the native city of the poet Paul Celan.

'My sister looks at me, gets up and goes away without a word' (Levi, 1987: 65-6). The scenario Levi pictured may have seemed nightmarish to Levi, notes Laub, but his fear of not being listened to was both common among survivors, and quite justified. However, the primary motivation for not wanting to hear the stories of survivors in reality, he suggests, is not the indifference Levi imagined, but another kind of fear - fear *of the survivor*:

> 'Insofar as they remind us of a horrible, traumatic past, insofar as they bear witness to our own historical disfiguration, survivors frighten us. They pose for us a riddle and a threat from which we cannot turn away. We are indeed profoundly terrified to truly face the traumas of our history, much like the survivor and the listener are' (Laub, 1992(a): 73-4).

Laub's comments are absolutely crucial in relation to understanding the epistemological, existential and moral chasm between survivors and the world. It would no doubt be simpler and perhaps also comforting to the rest of society to think of the existential condition of survivors solely in terms of the survivor's post-catastrophic psychopathology, but the fact is that, as Laub points out, we are afraid of survivors with their tales of horrible experiences, and the more we can identify with them socially and culturally, the more we sense that what happened to them could happen to us, and the more afraid of them we are. Survivors may thus think we do not want to hear them out of indifference or callousness, when in fact we do not want to hear them because we cannot bear to think about what they have to say.

Laub does not suggest that these issues of telling, listening, and being listened to are by any means unique to survivors of the Holocaust, but in a subsequent essay 'An Event Without Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival' (Laub, 1992 (b)) he does highlight one extraordinary phenomenal characteristic of the Holocaust - that of being an event which was effectively without contemporary witnesses, in the sense of not having been openly acknowledged at the time as happening. This is true, notes Laub, not only of 'outsiders', such as the friends or neighbours of the victims, but also of 'insiders'- Jews who were not yet victims themselves but were, as they would have become increasingly aware, intended to be so. Laub ascribes the failure on the part of insiders to bear witness to what was happening to their being trapped inside the event, and having succumbed not only to the Nazi propaganda narrative of their own otherness and inhumanity, but also to a state of frozen incomprehensibility concerning what was happening to them and to others like them. They found it impossible,

in effect, to acknowledge the truth of their own annihilation and loss of identity as human beings. Jean Améry, who spent some months in Berlin in 1935, also describes this phenomenon. The capitulation of German Jews to the image of them portrayed by Nazi propagandists such as Julius Streicher could not in the end be resisted, he said, even by the brightest and most upright Jewish minds. Their resignation was not moral, or philosophical, but in the end nothing more than an acknowledgment of social reality: 'This, so they must have told themselves, is how the world sees us, as lazy, ugly useless and evil; in view of such universal agreement what sense does it still make to object and say that we are *not* that way!' (Améry, 1999:87).

Consequently, Laub argues, post-Holocaust testimony is often the *only* means of bearing witness to that event, but it is an imperfect one, since it is affected by the limits of the human cognitive capacity to perceive or assimilate retrospectively the totality of what really happened at the time the original experience(s) occurred. That, he says, is why organisations such as the Fortunoff Video Archive, in order to enable survivors to bear witness, require them to *relive* their experience(s) through narrating their trauma stories in the presence of a listener who to a certain extent takes on the joint responsibility of bearing witness to it. Whilst this can be an effective means of reconciling the survivor with the truth of what happened, and facing his loss and pain, it cannot, Laub emphasises, efface the past. Indeed, far from constituting a healing process it can sometimes end up destroying illusions on which the survivor has rebuilt his post-Holocaust life. If this can be the outcome even when an appropriately trained and empathetic witnessing professional is involved whose principal concern is to alleviate the survivor's condition, and aid her recovery, one can only imagine how much greater the danger of personal destruction might be in other cases of mediated recollection - say in the case of giving evidence in judicial proceedings, especially under cross examination, or before military or immigration officials. The obvious question which needs to be asked in relation to any particular instance of Holocaust testimony and almost certainly other kinds of catastrophe testimony, therefore, is whether, and if so how, the right ethical balance can be struck between the potential psychological cost to the survivor of testifying and the benefits to her and others of recovering and narrativizing the memories of her experiences. Whilst this question clearly needs to be addressed by anyone who participates in the process of extracting of the testimony in question, it should also be addressed, I would

contend, by all those who may choose to advocate or participate directly or indirectly in the solicitation of catastrophe testimonies as source material.

7.9 Finding Epistemic Value in 'Unreliable' Testimony

Given the findings of Laub and others, to what extent is it therefore possible to rely on catastrophe testimony as a source of documentary information? And how far should the fact that events or experiences described in a survivor's testimony may be shown to be inaccurately remembered, or even partly imagined, be regarded as invalidating her testimony as a *true* account of the event or experience in question? These are more nuanced questions than they might at first appear to be, since, as the following two examples illustrate, it involves determining what we mean when we talk about such an account being true.

The first example is a case recalled by Dori Laub, which concerned a woman in her late sixties relating her experience as an eyewitness to the Auschwitz *Sonderkommando* uprising of 1944 to interviewers from the Fortunoff Video Library, including to himself. ' "All of a sudden", she said, "we saw four [crematorium] chimneys going up in flames, exploding. The flames shot into the sky, people were running. It was unbelievable." ' (Laub, 1992 (a): 59). It was, Laub writes, a description offered with such intensity, passion, and colour that members of the woman's audience were transfixed by the images it aroused, but it was also factually inaccurate, since only one of the chimneys had in fact been blown up. The videotape of the interview was later reviewed at a conference whose participants included historians and psychoanalysts, at which historians argued that because the woman's memory had proved to be fallible in relation to the number of chimneys destroyed, her whole account of the event should be considered more generally unreliable. Laub disagreed. The woman, he argued, had been testifying to something more radical and crucial than the number of chimneys blown up, namely to the occurrence of an event that was almost inconceivable - a Jewish armed revolt in Auschwitz, where such revolts just did not happen. The fundamental historical 'truth' it revealed was that the 'total domination' framework of Auschwitz could be and had been broken, however briefly, and ultimately unsuccessfully. The historians had been influenced in discrediting the witness's account by what she had not known of certain facts of the event, but she had been testifying not to the facts of a single event, but rather to the traumatic experience of imprisonment in Auschwitz, and her memory of an event she recalled as part of that experience. She was, as Laub puts it, testifying 'not simply to empirical

historical facts, but to the very secret of survival and of resistance to extermination'. The testifier 'saw' four chimneys blowing up because this was how the glorious unbelievability of what happened - the bursting open of the very frame of Auschwitz as a place of subjugation and death willed by others, in which resistance was impossible - was represented in her memory (ibid. :62). It was to *this '*eyewitness' experience that she had come to testify. The historians, Laub concluded, may have thought that because the woman did not know the number of chimneys blown up, or other salient historical facts about the uprising, such as the extent of its failure, or the part played in its failure by the betrayal of the resisters by the Polish underground, she knew nothing. But they were wrong; in knowing about the breaking of the Auschwitz frame, Laub considered that she effectively 'knew' far more than they did, or could know, of what had happened.

In her commentary on Laub's interview, Larissa Allwork suggests that eyewitness testimony of mind and sense-numbing catastrophic experiences can nevertheless render them 'speakable'. She recounts her own interview with the Holocaust survivor Kitty Hart-Moxon, who also worked in the 'Kanada' commando at Auschwitz-Birkenau between March and October 1944.[32] Hart-Moxon recalled witnessing the continuous procession of people to the gas chambers. 'You heard them scream and you saw the fire, and you saw the smoke, but you couldn't believe…. It's just something your brain can't accept' she says. She could see the ash coming down from the crematoria chimneys, the piles of corpses, the tins of gas, could even smell the gas, she said, but still she couldn't take in the reality that all those people were dying 'because if you could take it in, you would commit suicide'. Her testimony, notes Allwork, underlines the fact that, contrary to the readings of trauma narratives by some commentators which emphasise the 'unspeakability' of experiences such as that of Hart-Moxon, and despite her claiming that her experience was more than her mind could process, Hart-Moxon had succeeded in actually 'speaking trauma' in describing of their 'cumulative wounding assault' on her senses (Allwork, 2016: 16-17).

The second example of 'truth-conducive' rather than factually accurate catastrophe testimony is recounted by the renowned historian Christopher Browning, in the context of his study of the testimonies of 173 survivors of a complex of Jewish factory slave labour camps

[32]'Kitty Hart-Moxon interviewed by Larissa Allwork', Unpublished Transcript, interview date 19 August 2013, cited in Allwork, 2016: 16, fn. 50.

in Starachowice, in the Radom district of central Poland, presented as a study of traumatic memory. The theme of Browning's account is to demonstrate how a historian of the Holocaust may use 'a variety of different, often conflicting and contradictory, in some cases clearly mistaken, memories and testimonies of individual survivors as evidence to construct a history that otherwise, for lack of evidence, would not exist' (Browning, 2003:39). Such a history can be deemed reliable for a historian's purposes, Browning argues, as long as it results not from a default presumption of acceptance of survivor testimony, but rather from critical judgments made by the historian concerning his sources based on what questions he is asking, and his professional assessment of the capacity of those sources, including eyewitness accounts, to provide reliable and relevant information .

Almost all of the Starachowice testimonies were given orally and contemporaneously recorded, but in three different contexts. Most (116) of them were taken by German judicial investigators, for the purpose of prosecuting alleged Nazi war criminals for specific crimes under the German Criminal Code in the 1960s, and the remainder were either taken in Poland in the immediate post-war period (as early as 1945) or recorded for various memorial or archival institutions in the United States during the 1980s and 1990s, save for one account published as a book-length memoir. Browning's account focuses on events which some of the testifiers reported as occurring during the last week of July 1944, when prisoners from a subsidiary labour camp were transported to the main labour camp. It begins with the prisoners awaiting their impending evacuation from the main camp to Auschwitz-Birkenau, whilst also learning of the failed attempt to assassinate Hitler, and more or less at the same time hearing the distant sound of the approaching Red Army forces. Against the background of these chaotic circumstances which produced in them a state of high excitement but also fear, there was disagreement between those prisoners who believed they would be murdered in Birkenau and argued that they should attempt to escape before they could be evacuated, and those who preferred to allow themselves to be transported in the hope that this would give them of a better chance of ultimate survival. During this period, some testifiers recalled a specific incident in which Guta B., an 18 year old female prisoner, attacked the German commander of the largely Ukrainian camp guards, Willi Schroth, and was then shot by him and left for dead. However, she survived and her life was later saved as a result of bribes given by other prisoners to the camp Commandant in return for letting her live. Browning

analyses the different accounts of the incident, and its aftermath, given in the testimonies of various survivors, including two recorded interviews given by Guta B. herself, in 1984 and 1990.

In her 1984 interview Guta B. recalls the incident occurring when, having been made to line up with other prisoners in front of a mass grave, Schroth told her she and the others were to be shot. She reacted by jumping on his back and attacking him, primarily, she said, in order to save her parents' lives by creating a distraction and giving them time to escape. However, she was pulled off by the guards, at which point Schroth attempted to shoot her in the head, but only succeeded in grazing her. The guards then scattered, on hearing the sound of approaching Russian bombers, and she escaped and was hidden by her parents. The next day, she said, on hearing that Schroth had threatened to kill all the prisoners in the previous day's line up if she wasn't given up to him, she gave herself up, but was subsequently released after the Commandant of the camp, Kurt Otto Baumgarten, had been bribed with valuables belonging to her boyfriend, to let her live. Guta B.'s 1990 account basically repeated this story, but added that Schroth had previously made drunken sexual advances towards her.

Browning found that there were some differences between the account of Guta B. and that of other survivors. Firstly, none of the other witnesses recalled, as Guta B. had, prisoners being lined up in front of a mass grave to be shot, or any other incidents of executions taking place in the camp, although two of them stated that the guards sometimes staged mock executions to torment prisoners. Secondly , other witnesses remember Guta B., on attacking Schroth, calling on all prisoners rather than just her parents to escape but them being too paralysed by fear to act. Thirdly, two other witness confirm that Guta B.'s life was spared as a result of Baumgarten being bribed, but recall that the bribe was a collective one to which numerous prisoners, rather than just her boyfriend, contributed. In all three cases, Browning judged the versions of other witnesses to be more plausible than that of Guta B. Nevertheless, he believed it was possible to conclude beyond reasonable doubt that the main facts of her account were true, that she had indeed attacked Schroth, in a singular, brave, and virtually suicidal act of resistance, had been shot in the head but survived, and had escaped retribution as a result of a bribe given to Baumgarten. Bribery was, he found, a recognized means widely employed by prisoners to save the lives of their friends and families, but he accepted that it was done in Guta B.'s case in recognition of, and gratitude for, her attempt

to save the lives of others. As for her recollection of being lined up in front of a mass grave to be shot, Browning concluded this was simply an 'archetypal Holocaust image' which had become constructively incorporated into her memory.

The more general finding of Browning's study was that the 'core memory' of the Starachowice testifiers regarding their experiences, including the events on which he had focused his study, was generally consistent and reliable, despite having been recorded at different times, and in very different environments, over a period of fifty years. This he suggests, largely disproved the 'disparaging cliché' that memories of such experiences becomes sanitized and simplified by the passage of time (ibid. :81). Survivor testimony, even decades after the event, he concluded, remains a valuable source of information for historians, provided it is critically analysed, rather than accepted at face value, even if the result is difficult to bear. It might be easier to do this, he conceded, in the case of an uplifting story of resistance, such as that of Guta B., but we should be prepared to accept stories of the camps that are not particularly edifying, and which tend to confirm the reality that terrible persecution does not typically ennoble its victims, with a few 'magnificent exceptions.' Thus we should not presume the truthfulness of accounts by survivors of their experience just because they offer tales of edification and redemption (ibid.:85).

Browning's analysis offers direct support for the notion that memory even of the most febrile incidents, or traumatic experiences, can, whilst unconsciously weaving reality and imagination, nevertheless yield reliable information. The problem, of course, is that it is one thing for a highly skilled, and empathetic, yet scrupulously objective, historian like Browning to evaluate such testimony for truthfulness, but quite another for such evaluation to be carried out by someone not endowed with Browning's skills or experience, or less impartial, such as a perpetrator's legal counsel, or even someone openly hostile, such as a Holocaust denier. Nevertheless, I read Browning's message as a welcome endorsement of the spirit of Améry's exhortation to his readers cited at the end of section 6.4 above.

7.10 Instrumentalizing Catastrophe Testimony for Social and Political Theorizing: The Case of Hannah Arendt

In earlier sections of this chapter I touched upon the clinical and ethical issues arising out of the employment of 'trauma stories' produced in the course of the individual treatment of those suffering from post-traumatic psychological disorders for the purposes of supporting

social and political objectives espoused by clinicians and others. In this Section, I look more widely at the issues arising out of the use of catastrophe testimony by social and political commentators as evidence in support of their theoretical hypotheses concerning the testifiers' experiences. I will be focusing on one of the best known examples of such theorizing, namely Hannah Arendt's depiction of Nazi concentration camps, in her book *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Arendt,1951: 437-459). My objective in doing so is not to offer a critique of the substance of Arendt's theories, but rather to consider the political and ethical issues which have been raised regarding her employment of catastrophe testimony in the service of promoting such theories.

In brief, Arendt regarded the Nazi concentration and extermination camps[33], like those of some other totalitarian regimes, as 'laboratories' in which, she claimed, the Nazi experiment of achieving total domination over other human beings was carried out, and, she believed, almost perfectly realized:

> The camps are meant not only to exterminate people and degrade human beings, but also serve the ghastly experiment of eliminating, under scientifically controlled conditions, spontaneity itself as an expression of human behaviour and of transforming human personality into a mere thing…..(ibid. :438).

Arendt's belief that the Nazi experiment had been almost wholly successful did not acknowledge the fact that an, albeit proportionately tiny, number of prisoners had successfully resisted this fate and survived their experience, nor the fact that accounts by survivors of their existence, particularly in Auschwitz, clearly evidenced the preservation to some extent of those human qualities which Arendt supposed to have been destroyed. One can explain this to some extent by the fact that at the time of writing her book survivor accounts such as that of Primo Levi were as yet unwritten, or at least unavailable. Those which were in existence had been largely obtained purely for judicial purposes as evidence in actions taken against perpetrators in municipal courts in Germany and the formerly occupied territories, many of which had become part of the largely inaccessible Soviet empire. Moreover, to be fair to Arendt, her depiction of the life of prisoners in the Nazi camps as a

[33] Arendt refers to the camps as 'concentration and extermination camps' but the 'experiment' she describes primarily involved prisoners in concentration camps. It would also include the treatment of prisoners in Auschwitz and other extermination camps selected to survive the gas chambers on arrival at the camp, but the accounts on which she bases her thesis are those of survivors of other concentration camps.

daily, animalistic, struggle for survival which virtually eliminated moral choices is not substantially in conflict with those produced by Jewish survivors such as Primo Levi. What is of greater relevance, however, from the perspective of this dissertation, is Arendt's selection of her sources from the testimony that was available to her, and her ready adoption of the narratives of life in the camps which they conveyed.

Arendt's portrait of the existence of prisoners in the camps generally drew heavily on the accounts of three survivors - David Rousset, Eugen Kogan, and Bruno Bettelheim - the first two of whom were not Jews, and had been imprisoned as political prisoners, and the last of whom who was an Austrian Jew, but had been imprisoned in Dachau and Buchenwald in May 1938, and released in April 1939, before taking refuge in the United States later that year. Arendt, notes Michal Aharony, in fact drew her concept of total domination largely from the writings of Rousset, a French Protestant and Trotskyite arrested for activities in the French Resistance and imprisoned in Buchenwald, whose accounts of his experiences appeared in 1945-6, notably in *L'Univers Concentationnaire* (1946), long before there was any real discourse concerning the Nazi camps more generally. Arendt's thesis therefore applied to only a tiny minority of by far the largest category of those murdered in the Nazi camps, namely Jewish deportees murdered on arrival at Auschwitz and the 'Reinhard' extermination camps, and did not apply at all to the two million or so Jews murdered otherwise than in the camps. Arendt chose from a theorizing perspective, suggests Aharony, to see the extermination camps as a 'by-product' of a total domination experiment designed for implementation as part of a much larger project for the total domination of all 'inferior' races and 'undesirable' elements of society, which would ultimately incorporate both concentration and extermination camps (Aharony, 2015: 53-4). Unsurprisingly, therefore, Arendt's thesis does not take into account the centrality of anti-Semitism as the particular and crucial driving force of the Holocaust.

Aharony further questions whether the fate of those Jewish prisoners who *did* become the objects of the Nazi experiment of total domination (those selected for extermination through forced labour and starvation, rather than in the gas chambers), actually supports Arendt's claim that the experiment had been carried out nearly to perfection. She points to the factual inconsistency between that conclusion and the accounts of individual survivors like Primo Levi of moral, and occasionally physical, resistance to the oppressions of camp life, of solidarity

among prisoners, and of, albeit rare, instances of collective resistance, such as the Auschwitz *Sonderkommando* uprising. She also queries the extent to which Arendt's apparent acceptance of Rousset's personal experience of the 'constant animalistic struggle for life' in Buchenwald can be considered as an invariable feature of life for all kinds of prisoner in all types of camps. Here, though, I think Aharony's argument is on weaker ground; the *Sonderkommando* uprisings in Auschwitz and other camps, for instance, involved a tiny minority of prisoners and were a desperately courageous reaction to the imminent threat of collective extermination by those who knew that, as key witnesses to the atrocities committed in the camp, they could not be allowed to live. Similarly, whereas one might see the extremely low suicide rates in the camps as testament to the solidarity and will to live of prisoners determined to resist the attempts of their captors to exterminate them, one has to balance that against the far greater numbers of '*musselmanner*' who surrendered, without resistance and perhaps with relief, to their fate.

Aharony's most pertinent criticism, though, from a testimonial perspective, relates to Arendt's attitude to survivor testimony. Arendt argues that the most 'authentic' survivor accounts were those which dwelt least on those sufferings of victims 'that evade human understanding and human experience' and suggested that survivor reports were often regarded as suspect, and that their truth was sometimes doubted even by the testifiers themselves, once they had returned to the 'world of the living' (Arendt, 1951: 439)[34]. Aharony argues that these words evidenced a conscious refusal to give meaning to the suffering of the victims, whom Arendt alleged had been deprived of their personality and character, and whom she could not thus could admit to have been 'capable of reflecting on their experiences in any meaningful way' (ibid. :211)[35]. She ascribes Arendt's view partly to her wish to keep a sentimental distance from the victims of total domination in order to avoid the 'politics of

[34] This view seems to be based on the comments of Bettelheim and Rousset (ibid.: fn. 128).

[35] Arendt's reference to Holocaust victims as having passively gone to their deaths like 'sheep to the slaughter' in her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: a Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963) would probably be ranked by many critics as a far more egregious example of what appears to be an unfortunate failing to empathise with the suffering of victims of the Holocaust, and specifically with East European Jews, and perhaps also a wish to distance herself from their fate. Arendt was though far from alone in her view, since other prominent figures, such as Raul Hilberg, Zygmunt Bauman, and Bruno Bettelheim, as well as some Israeli commentators, held similar views, and sometimes expressed them in more extreme terms. In fact reviews of Arendt's book on the Eichmann trial in the Israeli press were generally positive, and although the Holocaust was often invoked to justify the Zionist project by Israeli politicians at the time, the fate of its diasporic Jewish victims was generally viewed rather unempathetically by ardent Zionists.

pity' - the danger of her political judgment being ruled by compassion and pity, rather than reason - but also as evidencing a 'theory of judgment' which privileged the 'representative' view of the notionally disinterested spectator over the subjective, idiosyncratic view of the 'engaged actor' in relation to political and moral judgments generally. Alternatively, Aharony implies, Arendt may have simply found it easier to represent, or imagine, the standpoint of the perpetrator, with whom she could not identify, than that of the victim with whom she perhaps preferred not to identify. The probability is that all these considerations influenced Arendt's development of her conception of the existential condition of prisoners in the camps generally, in which case, as Aharony contends, the description of the daily existence of prisoners offered by an engaged actor such as Primo Levi represents, despite its subjective and idiosyncratic viewpoint, a *more* epistemically informed and morally balanced view of existence in a camp such as Auschwitz than that of Arendt.

The stated objective of Aharony's critique is not to dismiss Arendt's theory of total domination, but rather to show its limitations as a sweeping generalisation, based on limited and narrowly sourced testimonial evidence. She argues the need for a more nuanced and particularist view of the behaviour, psychological condition, morality, and powers of resistance of prisoners in different concentration camps, which acknowledges the capacity for humanity in inhuman circumstances and places, and that is an argument with which I would certainly concur. There is a wider issue at stake though, which is how one balances the socio-political imperative to construct a general interpretative framework within which one might analyse and draw valuable lessons from the Nazi 'experiment' of total domination, on the one hand, and the moral imperative to accurately and ethically represent the individual humanity of victims of such an experience – not only their suffering, doubts or weaknesses but also, for example, their courage, will to survive, generosity to others and resilience. In an ideal world we would benefit from having both survivor testimony, and a viable theoretical framework within which we can attempt to bring the experiences and existential condition of survivors at least to some extent within the realm of our comprehension, and thus make some sort of sense of what happened to them. In an ideal world, we would also be able to settle cases of conflict between the two, for example, as Aharony suggests, by using the testimony of individual survivors to refine the concepts or arguments of the theorizers so that they become more nuanced, or balanced. My own sense, though, is that theorizing and

testifying are intrinsically different phenomena, and perhaps that's how it should be. It is perhaps the case, as Laub and Browning both imply from their different perspectives, that the accounts of survivors, and the evaluations of psychologists, historians, and other commentators may seek, or yield, different *kinds* of knowledge. As I see it, though, they simply have different and not necessarily complementary objectives. It may be that the political story which Arendt told was imprecise, ideological, inadequately researched, and one told too soon after the event, yet it was, and remains, a story of immense value, and importance in providing a theoretical basis for those who were not there to think about what occurred in the Nazi camps, and so we are surely better off for having it. The issue, as I see it, is more whether Arendt was right to consider herself intellectually and morally entitled to offer sweeping and dehumanizing generalisations, in the service of her theorizing, about the existence of those whose experiences she had neither shared nor could imagine, whether or not they survived, especially when that theorizing amounted in effect to denying their individual humanity.

7.11 Summary

In Part Three of this dissertation I have been looking at the existential and moral chasm between survivors and the world from the perspective of particular recipients of catastrophe testimony – those with a largely non-adversarial interest in what such testimony has to say, such as psychologists and cognitive scientists, historians and social and political theorists. Whilst their interests in analysing and interpreting catastrophe testimony may be different, the underlying objective of such recipients in undertaking the task of analysis or interpretation appears to me to be essentially the same – to narrow the existential and moral chasm between testifiers and the world by making those testifiers and/or their catastrophic experiences more intelligible to themselves, and through themselves to the world. Sometimes this might involve the recipient attempting to reach out intellectually and emotionally towards the survivor of the catastrophic experience, but more often it appears to me to involve the recipient attempting to repaint the world of the survivor in the conceptual and semantic colours of the world of the recipient – that is to reduce the world of the survivor to that part of it which can be understood or envisaged by the recipient, This is not to suggest that recipients who adopt the latter approach are acting out of bad or immoral motives; the reduction of a survivor's traumatic narrative by a psychotherapist to something

more explicable to herself and the world, for example, may be of real social and psychological benefit to the survivor. It is to suggest, however, that as a general rule whilst recipients who attempt to reach out to survivors are more likely to succeed in narrowing the existential and moral chasm between them, recipients who attempt to reduce the world of the survivor to that which they can understand or envisage are more likely to widen both chasms. In other words, that the price for increased intelligibility may be reduced authenticity. Hacking, for instance, warns of the danger that rendering accounts of catastrophic experiences clinically intelligible, might amount to 'rewriting the souls' of their subjects, in order to reconstitute the subject's introspective beliefs as objective, clinically evaluable, 'truths'. That is, it may involve literally taking the subject's words out of her mouth and replacing them with words that may be more intelligible, psychologically explicable and theoretically convenient and also easier for the subject to accept as true, but which no longer authentically represent the essence of the originally remembered experience, or even of the subject's subsequently constructed representation of it. Hacking, together with Herman, and others, have also flagged the dangers of trauma stories produced in the course of treatment for post-traumatic psychological disorders being influenced, or even distorted, by the therapist's own emotional or psychic reaction to her client's story, her social or political ideology, or her espousal of a particular generic clinical hypotheses relating to her client's condition. Laub and Browning have also, in their different ways, identified failings in the approach of historians and others who judge the truthfulness or reliability of trauma testimony in terms primarily of its factual accuracy, or consistency with other accounts. Finally, Arendt's theorizing raises the question of whether the benefits of such an exercise can ever be justly acquired at the cost of denying the humanity of victims of those experiences.

Thus, the question of whether mediated, re-evaluated, or reinterpreted catastrophe testimony should be deemed more or less reliable or 'truth' conducive than first person autobiographical accounts by testifiers of their experiences, like many other questions which have arisen in relation to testimony in general and catastrophe testimony in particular in this dissertation, does not invite and should not be met with facile responses. We should be prepared to give credence to both mediated and unmediated accounts of catastrophic experiences but in neither case should we do so uncritically, or without having due regard for

the context of the account, the perspective of its producer(s), and the motivations which drive its presentation or solicitation.

The underlying first principle which I argue should drive any evaluation of catastrophe testimony, however, is that testimony which is not *first person* testimony is, *prima facie* not testimony. This is not only true in the sense that testimony should present the testifier's experience of catastrophe and survival as she recollects experiencing it, but also that her testimony can only be authentically delivered in her own words. If such authenticity means sacrificing the intelligibility of her testimony to others, then we may have to accept that. Laub and Browning have shown how the best of professional commentators can work around such constraints. The world of testimony is any event rapidly moving on. The renowned Holocaust historian Annette Wievorka said 'the era of the witness'- the era in which subjective eyewitness accounts of Holocaust survivors began to be prioritised over accounts based on administrative records - did not begin in earnest until around 1980. In the case of subsequent genocides, such as those in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, on the other hand, the reliance on eyewitness accounts, including those given immediately after or even during the events in question, or in real-time oral and video testimony, rather than documentary and other forms of historical testimony, became a fact of reporting those events. The problem of belief justification, knowledge acquisition and authenticity has now moved on further, with the advent of the smartphone and other forms of instantaneous recording and simultaneous transmission, to become one of perception rather than reflection - of whether we can believe what we see or hear in what purports to be real time. Is, for example, what purports to be an image of a catastrophic experience an authentic recording of that experience or a piece of clever editing?

In any event, I am confident that we are on *terra firma* as regards the authenticity of the testimonies of those whose accounts are to be examined in the following chapters. I have selected them for this dissertation in part because they seem to me to work on two narrative levels: a first 'storytelling' narrative of the phenomenal experience of being a victim or a survivor of a particular catastrophic experience and a second metanarrative which reflects, through the medium of that first narrative, on the existential condition of victimhood and survival more generally. It is with the second of these narratives that I am particularly concerned to engage in the next chapter.

PART FOUR

CATASTROPHE TESTIMONY IN THE WORLD

CHAPTER 8. HOW SURVIVORS SEE THEMSELVES AND THE WORLD: INTRODUCTION, RAPE AND TORTURE.

8.1 Introduction

In this Chapter and Chapter 9 I will be exploring the epistemological, existential and moral chasm between survivors of catastrophic experiences and the world from the perspective of the survivors - asking, in other words, how testifiers see themselves in the present and the past, and also how they perceive their existence as survivors in the world. In this chapter I will be focusing on the accounts of Karyn L. Freedman, a victim and survivor of rape, and Jean Améry, as a victim and survivor of torture – crimes which both involve intimate and brutal personally directed violations of the victim's body and mind. In the next chapter I will be focusing on four survivors, from very different backgrounds and with different perspectives, of one of the most notorious collective atrocities in history, namely that which occurred in Auschwitz and other Nazi concentration camps. The works featured in this chapter and Chapter 9 encompass a variety of presentational forms - documentary, anecdotal, essayistic and poetic - and were written at different times after the occurrence of the catastrophic experiences to which they relate. Consequently I hope that they will offer as broad a picture of survivor experiences and responses as is possible within the constraints of the available space.

I am making a *default* presumption for the purposes of this dissertation that all the testimonies examined in this chapter and Chapter 9 are truthful, in the sense that they faithfully re-present the phenomenally experienced catastrophic experiences of their authors *as recollected at the time of writing*, and also their subsequent experiences as survivors. My justification for making this presumption, beyond my general acceptance of the non-reductionist account of belief justification, and my general acceptance of the generativist

account of memory, is that survivors of horrific experiences which are extremely painful to recollect do not generally publish their testimonial accounts of them unless they sincerely feel that those accounts represent, to the best of their intellectual, psychic and emotional ability, the truth of such an experience, and want others to know that truth. I see that presumption as being stronger than the general non-reductionist presumption of trust in a speaker, on account of what is at stake personally for the testifier in testifying, but one which may nevertheless be rebutted by counter-evidence. However, I stress that 'truth' in this context means the truth as sincerely understood by the testifier at the point of her testimony. An illustration of the difference between such subjective 'testimonial truths' and facticity appears in Laub's report of the case of the female prisoner who witnessed the explosion of the Auschwitz crematorium chimney during the *Sonderkommando* uprising, described in Chapter 7. She was a member of the 'Kanada Kommando'- prisoners compelled to undertake the grim and traumatic task of sorting out the belongings of those who had been gassed so that any of use or value could be sent to Germany[36]. When interviewed, reports Laub, though the witness clearly recalled secreting some items of clothing and giving them as presents for the use of her fellow prisoners, she denied knowing that these items of clothing were the former possessions of prisoners who had been gassed. For Laub, however, this did not bring into question the woman's general trustworthiness as an eyewitness, but rather illustrated the 'subtle balance' between what she *knew* and what she *did not* or *could not* know; that is between the knowledge which her mind *allowed* her to access as memory, and that which, because she could not bring herself to acknowledge the truth of it, it blocked (Laub, 1992(a): 60-61).

Catastrophe testimony is thus more than just remembering past events; it is an epistemic, existential and moral encounter between the testifier and his or her former self. Nor is the role which memory plays in that encounter a fixed one. It may be that of a bridge facilitating the survivor's attempts to recall or interpret the past, but equally that of a barrier wholly or

[36] However grim, though, this was perhaps one of the less degrading and traumatic tasks performed by members of the 'Special' squads. Other tasks included removing bodies from the gas chambers, extracting gold teeth from the corpses, cutting the hair, initially from dead women, and subsequently from those about to be murdered, burning corpses, and grinding up the ashes of cremated victims into dust for disposal. What must have made the trauma even more unbearable was that when it was found that the presence of *Sonderkommando* had a calming effect on those about to be gassed, some members of the Squad were made to stay with them while they undressed before entering the 'shower room' (Chare and Williams,2015: 5).

partially obstructing those attempts, especially where the survivor scents such an exercise might be psychologically hazardous for her. As Freedman, speaking both as a philosopher and a rape survivor, notes: 'Our minds are powerfully protective of us, and can block memories that we lack the emotional resources to handle' (Freedman, 2014: x). Alternatively, memory might act in a diversionary manner, redirecting the present self's contemplations onto a path which it deems less hazardous, or easier, to travel. Moreover, the underlying personality of the survivor may be significant in determining how the memorial process functions in practice. Freedman, for instance, whose story is one not only of trauma but also at least partial recovery, emphasises the protective role of memory, as part of the wider cognitive function of adapting and reconstructing memorial images to conform with the psychological needs of the testifier. Améry, on the other hand, who never recovered from his experiences, found that his sense of alienation not only from the world but also from his former self was actually exacerbated by his memories of the past. He speaks, for example, of the 'genuine' homesickness his memories of his former Austrian homeland stirred in him as a refugee, which, in contrast to 'traditional' nostalgic homesickness, invoked 'self-contempt and hatred for the lost self', the pain of which, he said, was intensified and made almost unbearable by episodes of traditional homesickness. It resulted, he said in 'a totally impossible, neurotic condition for which there is no psychoanalytic remedy' (Améry, 1999: 51).

There do, however, seem to be some generally recurring themes in the autobiographical accounts of catastrophic experiences examined below, The first is a sense of *disconnection* between survivors and the post-traumatic world in which they exist as survivors – a sense of being *in* it but not *of* it. The second, apparently particularly felt by Améry and Freedman, is the loss of trust in the world to which they return following their catastrophic experience. Most basically, this implies a loss of trust in the world as a just and safe place for the survivor on a personal level, such as, in the case of a rape survivor, a fear of walking through unlit or secluded places. However, it frequently also involves a much wider loss of social trust – trust that one's physical and mental integrity will be respected by one's fellow human beings, or protected by those in authority. Loss of social trust is most acute in the case of survivors of collective atrocities which are perpetrated against them by, or with the active or passive support of, states of which they were citizens at the time, especially if they were perpetrated

without visible protest by members of the dominant social group(s) in that state, as in the case of Austria and Germany during the Third Reich. In the most acute cases survivors rarely return to live in such societies, if they are able to avoid doing so, preferring to start a new life in a new country, and often with a new identity. As Kusch (2017) notes, so many of the certainties on which social life is normally based may be lost when trust in society is lost – for example that the State is there to protect its citizens, that doctors exist to relieve pain or cure illness, and that special protection should be afforded to the sick, the young, and the elderly.[37] One can only feel at home said Améry, in a place which gives one a feeling of familiarity, and personal security. A person expelled from his native country as he was, he added, no longer even knew who he was: 'I was no longer an I and did not live within a We' (Améry, 1999: 44). He concluded that his former sense of being Austrian, and truly belonging to that land and its people, had been, in hindsight, nothing but an 'existential misunderstanding'.

The other common theme reflected in the testimonies I examine is the fundamental problem of communication which Kusch calls 'linguistic despair'- the inability of the testifier's words to articulate and communicate the phenomenal nature of his or her experiences, and especially the feelings or sensations he or she experienced. An Auschwitz survivor, for example, might speak of her 'hunger', 'thirst', or 'fear', whilst in the camp. But the hunger of which she speakers is that of someone constantly deliberately malnourished to the point of starvation, and even death, the thirst of which she speaks is that of someone whose throat is constricted to the point of being unable to swallow food, or speak coherently, and the fear of which she speaks is the constant terror of being murdered by an SS guard or a barracks *kapo.* The images and responses which these words evoke in the minds of any recipient of their testimony, on the other hand, will be those which are triggered by that recipient's lived experiences of hunger, thirst or fear, and thus will be wholly different from those the testifier is trying to convey, unless the recipient has had substantially the same experiences, and experienced them in substantially the same way (a vanishingly small possibility). Listeners or readers, on the other hand, may well believe they *have* understood what has been said, for,

[37] Kusch's interpretation is derived from his reading of Wittgenstein's 'hinge epistemology' in *On Certainty* which I would summarise in very simple terms as being that the account given by survivors, say, of their experiences of Nazi concentration camps to those who have not shared their experiences constitutes, in hinge-epistemic terms, an account of a world of uncertainties given to those who inhabit a world of certainties. One sees this reflected, for example, in the use of terms such as 'Planet Auschwitz', or the 'Univers Concentrationnaire' to describe the camps.

as Henry Greenspan notes: 'Whilst listening to survivors' reflections, nothing is more common than to think we follow when we do not'. (Greenspan, 1999: 47). Linguistic despair is thus not fundamentally semantic in nature, but rather an *experiential disconnection* expressed through language. Thus it cannot be fixed by the testifier's use of supplementary descriptive words or gestures. Even employing the most extreme descriptive language is of no help; the term 'starvation', for example, can no more convey the feeling of starvation experienced by someone being systematically starved to death in a concentration camp to someone who has not had that experience than the words 'hunger', or 'extreme hunger'. In the context of a place such as Auschwitz, moreover, the term 'starvation' expresses not only a physical state, but at the same time the psychic and existential condition of one who inhabits a 'death world' which is the complete antithesis of the social and moral world inhabited by the recipient. Thus, as Kusch points out, there is no language the testifier can employ which would capture the essence of her horrendous experience without turning it into something unworldly and unimaginable, and thus unreal (Kusch, 2017). The extent of this kind of disconnect, may be exacerbated by the motives of recipients in wanting to hear or read survivor testimony - for example, if they actively seek tales of 'death in life' (trauma and injury) or 'life in death' (resilience and strength) as Greenspan puts it (Greenspan, 1999:49).

Linguistic despair is thus not just a semantic phenomenon but an expression of the existential and moral chasm between the survivor and the world. For 'those whose task it was to write after the war- to witness, to name and rename, to bear their responsibility to the dead in whatever form of enquiry and expression this responsibility might take', Anne Michaels observes, ', the failure of language was a given'. 'Language itself is a witness', she adds. 'Morality holds us to account, and language, asserting or distorting morality, must be accountable' (Michaels, 2020:37). The failure of language, then, is an *innate* feature of the act of bearing witness. It marks the semantic, epistemological, existential and moral boundary between effable and ineffable human experiences. Améry thus declared that his book *At the Mind's Limits* had been specifically written *against* the notion that 'clarifying' his experiences, or his existential condition as a survivor, might be possible. Linguistic despair, he was arguing, far from being a problem to be fixed, is not only irremediable but *desirable*; a necessary and valuable semantic symbol of the unhealable nature of the wounds of which testifiers speak.

This is why terms like 'truth' and 'accuracy' *must* have less specific, more uncertain meanings in relation to catastrophe testimony than those we seek in testimony we look to primarily as a source of information, evidence, or knowledge. We also have to accept that the 'testimony' of survivors of catastrophic experiences may emerge only partially, or obscurely from their text - from its words but also its silences, and despite or through the imprecisions and inadequacies of language and argument. This may be anathema to those who seek 'meaning' in what they hear, see or read; those for example who see testifiers as having a duty to act as a 'moral witness' to the past. Some commentators suggest that Holocaust survivors, for instance, should consider themselves, as spokespersons for those who did not survive the camps and whose stories could not therefore otherwise be told, not in the sense of offering an eyewitness account of their suffering but as someone who, by describing their own suffering, and in some sense death, also bears witness to the fate of those who did not survive (Horowitz, Greenspan et al., 2014). The notion of moral witnessing may appear ethically compelling but, as Sara Horowitz points out, instrumentalizing testifiers as quasi-religious witnesses from history risks diminishing a more powerful ethical imperative that survivor accounts should represent 'a confrontation with radical demonization, evil and suffering that cannot easily be absorbed or explained' (ibid. :205) Listeners or readers might for example be tempted to invest the testifier with a wisdom, or moral stature that implies that her suffering had been 'worthwhile, purposeful, and ennobling, rather than random, outrageous and meaningless' (ibid.). Lawrence Langer likewise declares that the 'shrunken moral universe' of survivors 'full of ambiguities concerning the basis for personal conduct, mocks conceptual efforts, from Plato to the present, to determine the relationship between duty and the good life, what it is right to do and what it is good to be' (Langer, 1991; 198). And Primo Levi famously declared in *The Drowned and the Saved* that the survivors of the camps like himself were not in any event the true witnesses to the experience of being an inmate of such a camp, since by surviving they had not, unlike the 'drowned,' undergone, the final terrible stage of that experience - that of actually dying. Nevertheless, whatever *can* be said about experiences such as that of Auschwitz, beyond the purely factual, is best said in the voice of the survivors, for they alone are able to speak the language of catastrophe as a 'mother tongue'- one whose vocabulary is founded in the catastrophic experience itself rather than an attempted intellectual, moral, or emotional appreciation of it.

This leads us to address the issue of narrativization in catastrophe testimony, and especially in catastrophe testimony in autobiographical form. Whilst the question of the content of such testimony - *what* is remembered - may be a matter for psychologists and cognitive scientists, the question of presentation – *how and in what form* it is remembered – is a cultural question. It is determined by such factors as the personal qualities and experiences of the testifier, his or her objectives in testifying, the period of time which may have elapsed between the catastrophic experience and the time of writing about it, the testifier's state of mind at the time of writing, and not least by the testifier's literary preferences and talents as a writer. The documentary or anecdotal accounts of Freedman and Kluger, for example, are quite different from the essayistic accounts of Améry or the poetic accounts of Delbo, and the urgent accounts of Delbo and Levi written shortly after their liberation and return home are quite different from the more reflective accounts of their experiences written decades later. Some of the best examples, at least in my opinion, of catastrophe testimony are also found in the form of fictionalised autobiography, such as in some of the works of Imre Kertesz. I would therefore argue that catastrophe testimony should always be read in the context of the testifier's personal and cultural identity and objectives, which is why I have provided some brief biographical data for each of the testifiers whose works are featured herein.

Finally, I want to emphasise that this Chapter, and this dissertation more generally, are concerned specifically with *survivor* testimonies - that is products of the episodic memories of past events and experiences and the post-traumatic social, political, cultural and moral experiences and perspectives of their authors. Unfortunately, this precludes the inclusion of studies of accounts of those victims who did not survive: for example, the diaries and other records kept by numerous inhabitants of the Warsaw Ghetto collected in the so called 'Ringelblum Archive'[38], or the writings sometimes called the 'Scrolls of Auschwitz' - the testaments written by members of the Sonderkommando[39] at Auschwitz-Birkenau and buried in contemplation of their impending death, and subsequently found amid the ruins of Crematoria II and III at Birkenau. I would emphasise, however, that this omission should not

[38] A collection of about 6,000 essays, diaries, drawings, posters and other documents produced between 1939 and 1943 chronicling the life of inhabitants of the Warsaw Ghetto described by Annette Wievorka in Greenspan and others, 2014, page 213.

[39] Notably those of Zalman Gradowski, Zalman Lewenthal and Leyb Langfus. Gradowski was killed either in the course of the *Sonderkommando* 'uprising' of July 1944, or in retaliation for it, and Lewenthal, and Langus were probably killed in November of that year (Chare and Williams, 2015: 7).

be construed in any way as a judgment that such contemporary records are of lesser historical or moral value or importance than survivor testimonies. Their moral and historical value or importance is immense, but of a different kind.[40] There is certainly no question, as Chare and Williams (2015) point out, of *Sonderkommando* members being somehow rendered incapable of reliably bearing witness to the events in which they participated, as evidenced by the fact that survivors who had been members did testify at the trial of the former Auschwitz Commandant, Rudolf Höss, in 1947, and at the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial 1963-5.

In conclusion, I want to emphasize that the fact that I deal with the experiences of rape and torture, on the one hand, and imprisonment in Auschwitz on the other, in separate chapters does not imply that there are necessarily existential or experiential differences between the two. Indeed rape and torture are not necessarily private acts, and personally directed atrocities are not infrequently committed against victims of collective atrocities. Karyn L. Freedman (2014), for example, discusses instances of collective sexual violence against women and children employed as a weapon of war in the Democratic Republic of Congo during her time there in 2008-9, including rape and vaginal mutilation, as well as more 'routine' demands for sex in return for money or goods needed by victims for their survival. She speaks in particular of hearing accounts of such public humiliations as gang rape, or fathers being forced to publicly rape their daughters, or sons their mothers. These, she notes, were aimed not only at the physical and psychological humiliation, degradation, and destruction of individual victims, but more broadly at the terrorisation of groups, and the destruction of the social fabric of families and communities, which were objectives equally, though differently, pursued in concentration camps.

[40] There are many studies of such testimonies. In relation to the Scrolls of Auschwitz, see, for example, the extensive treatment in Chare and Williams, (2015).

8.2 Karyn L. Freedman: One Hour in Paris. A Story of Rape and its Aftermath

Freedman's own traumatic experience occurred in August 1990, when she was violently and brutally raped at knifepoint both vaginally and anally in an apartment in Paris over a period of approximately one hour, with the physical violence being accompanied by constant death threats. Her attacker was someone whom she had never previously met- a man who was sharing the apartment with a close friend who had invited her to stay with him, but was absent at the time of the attack. Freedman records that after the attack she exhibited a number of the typical symptoms of what she was later to come to know as PTSD, such as hyperarousal, a constant stream of flashbacks, sleeplessness, shallowness of breathing and also an inability to feel safe, even in public places in broad daylight- a response manifesting the disconnect between what the survivor rationally knows to be true of such a situation and her autonomic bodily response to being in it. Although these symptoms persisted, it was almost a decade before she 'came out' as a rape survivor, other than to her family and closest friends, and sought psychotherapy for her condition. A sense of shame and embarrassment in disclosing the humiliating nature of her experience was a material factor in this delay. This included her fear of being judged according to the 'dominant worldview' prevalent at the time that the world is a basically safe place for women who are sufficiently careful and intelligent, and that accordingly she must have carelessly and stupidly contributed to, or even collaborated in her fate.

The biggest lesson she learned from her own recovery process, Freedman said, was that 'in order to break free from the hold of the memory of a traumatic experience you first have to *live in it'* – to 'consciously revisit the memory of the experience and move through it' (Freedman, 2014: 95). In the course of that process, she found that whilst certain memories of her experience remained 'crystal clear', and permanently etched in her memory , such as her assailant's 'demonic' laughter, and the look of distraction in his eyes as he traced a knife across her naked breasts, she also experienced what is known as 'dissociative amnesia', or 'traumatic blocking'- in relation to other details of her experience (ibid. :104-5). These dissociated memories, she notes, cannot be integrated into declarative memory, which is the part of memory which structures life narratives, but they either survive as flashbacks or some form of somatic remembering, or remain repressed, even after undergoing psychotherapy. She could not, for example, recollect being taken to hospital after being raped, or the fact

that she had been assaulted on two separate occasions by her attacker, until she read evidence of these facts in contemporary police files.

The single most important thing that we can learn about psychological trauma, says Freedman, is that it is permanent - that the images it has imprinted on the survivor's mind never go away, no matter how hard she tries to get rid of them, and so she never fully recovers from her chronic traumatic condition. The best she can do is to try to manage the condition, which Freedman herself clearly made determined efforts to do, including revisiting the building in which she was raped, almost twenty years after the event. This is a process neuroscientists call 'episodic reconsolidation' which is said by some to stabilize the memory by converting short-term memories into long-term memories, so that recollection of the traumatic experience reconsolidates 'with new emotional information', theoretically enabling the survivor to live more easily with the trauma of what happened (ibid. :161-2). Despite her efforts, though, Freedman reports, even twenty-four years after the event she continues to experience 'flare-ups', as well as remissions, of her post-traumatic condition, as in the case of any chronic illness. The images of her experience, she declares, have not gone away; even in periods of remission they persist, and 'are easily provoked by signs of dissonance in my life' (ibid. :180). It is when the two parts of her 'shattered self' collide that the debilitating nature of her condition is most exposed.

Freedman's account of a rape survivor's loss of trust in the world- her 'shattered world view' as she calls it- is foreshadowed in her earlier (2010) account summarized in Section 7.3 above, written from her own experience, but more as an essayistic study of the subject. Her autobiographical book, though, is altogether more personal and visceral. 'Whether to go public with her story', she opines in 2014, 'is one of the toughest decisions a rape survivor faces' The survivor's sense of vulnerability, shame, embarrassment, and the feeling she should have been able to prevent the attack, are all reinforced by the dominant world view of rape victims she had assimilated. Yet ' keeping our rape stories secret lowers the decibel level on the magnitude of the problem and perpetuates the idea that rape happens somewhere else, to someone else', thus both making the victim complicit in covering up the realities of sexual violence in society, and internalizing her experience as a personal, rather than a social, problem (ibid. :77). The shattering of the victim's world view, she adds, is not a consequence of every traumatic experience, but it is a common experience of survivors of

traumatic experiences involving interpersonal violence, which change our understanding of human nature, and the world.

8.3 Jean Améry. A Preliminary Excursus.

The essays published in *At the Mind's Limits* were never intended to be read as a narrative of Améry's life. He supplied only such biographical data as he deemed necessary to elaborate their themes, and the fact that the essays were written as radio broadcasts lasting for one hour only allowed little time for autobiographical digression. Consequently, before examining his essays in greater detail, I want to firstly to elaborate the two latent autobiographical strands which run through them, which essentially reflect Améry's two 'selves'.

The first of these is his cultural self - that of left-wing intellectual and socially and politically engaged humanist of Austro- German cultural and educational background, and a German writer whose philosophical foundations were rooted in the neo-positivist philosophy of the Vienna Circle, with traces of his prior attachment to German rural romanticism. This remained his dominant intellectual identity throughout his life, though it became refracted through a post-war attachment to Sartrean existentialism, which he adopted as his own survivalist philosophy[41]. This is the Améry who, despite living in permanent self-exile in Brussels after 1945, and adopting a francophone-sounding name, addresses his essays specifically to his fellow German intellectuals, and sees the legacy of the years of the Third Reich as their problem as well as his, and dreams 'absurdly' that they may be addressed by them and him together.

The second of Améry's selves was his Jewish self, or rather the Jewish identity he finds himself needing to adopt, having declared that despite having 'masqueraded in 'white half socks and leather breeches' as a German youth, he had never been one, nor a German man (Améry, 1999: 82). Therefore, he said, he must be a Jew, even though he did not want to be one, because one he must be *something.* He will be a Jew who possesses no 'positive determinants' of Jewishness beyond that of being a Jewish victim of Nazism. Améry calls this

[41] Améry refers to Sartre as a 'father figure' (Améry, 1984: 18), and Heidelberger-Leonard calls Sartre the 'midwife' to his post-war philosophical rebirth (Heidelberger-Leonard, 2010: 115). My own sense of Sartre's function in Améry's life is that of a kind of philosophical 'life-coach', though the two men never actually met. Améry's own summary of Sartre's philosophy was: 'Man is only what he makes of himself. Man is free. Man is socially committed', which clearly signals, in its antithetical relationship to his experiences as a victim, a kind of action plan for remaking himself. (Améry, 1964: 27).

identity that of an 'Auschwitz Jew'. He declares to religious Jews who do not consider him to be Jewish that the Auschwitz tattoo on his forearm is 'more binding than basic formulas of Jewish existence' (Améry, 1999: 94), and to Germans that it is the legitimate source of his resentments against them concerning the past and present, and of his right to the address them as a 'vehemently protesting Jew'. It was more than a decade later, however, in his 1977 essay 'Mein Judentum' (translated as 'Being a Jew'' (Améry, 1984: 11-20)), written less than two years before his suicide, that Améry finally defined in more concrete terms the determinants of his identity as an Auschwitz Jew - that in Auschwitz he had been forced to relinquish his 'falsely proud consciousness' of himself as a resistance fighter for that of a Jew. 'The Jew', he wrote, was the sacrificial animal. He had to drink the cup, down to the bitter end. I drank. And this became my Jewish being'. *'Judaism* was another matter', he added. 'I had nothing to do with it' (Améry, 1984: 17).

Next, I want to underline the connection between Améry's decision to write the first of his *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne* essays, on his experience of Auschwitz, and the commencement, in December 1963, of a major trial in Frankfurt of various former Auschwitz SS personnel, including the notorious torturer Wilhelm Boger, inventor of the 'Boger swing' in which helpless victims were suspended in great pain upside down exposing their buttocks and genitals to beatings with whips and clubs (Pendas, 2006: 98-99).[42] It has to be said that the trial did not turn out to be the seismic didactic event that Améry and others would have wished for. Many participants and observers were in fact dismayed with some aspects of the proceedings, including the disrespectful and intimidating treatment of witnesses by the defendants' lawyers, the indifference and inattention of many spectators, and the leniency of many of the sentences pronounced on the guilty. Nevertheless, the trial, which lasted for twenty months, presented Améry with the ideal contemporaneous backdrop for his intellectual and moral assault on the consciousness of his listeners, and later his readers, and particularly those who had either been born after 1945 , or had been too young to have been infected by the *zeitgeist* of the Nazi era, from whom the truth about what occurred during the years 1933-45 had been largely withheld. Moreover, despite its evident flaws, the trial

[42] Pendas records that twenty-four defendants were originally charged, of whom twenty-two were declared fit to be tried, with twenty of them remaining at the end of the trial. They ranged in rank from Sturmbannführer (Major) to Sturmann (Private), including four former members of the camp's 'medical service'. The trial lasted from December 1963 until August 1965, and involved 359 witness testifying in person, of whom 211 were former inmates - 90 Jews, 4 'gypsies', 104 political prisoners and 13 criminal prisoners (Pendas, 2006:100-102).

and the often sensationalist media coverage which accompanied it undoubtedly had, as Irène Heidelberger-Leonard observes, some social and didactic significance for the German people as a whole. Most of all, it dispelled the myth that the atrocities committed by the Third Reich had been the responsibility of a small 'Hitler clique', and fuelling the political debate concerning the extension of the legal limitation period for the prosecution of war crimes under German law (Heidelberger-Leonard, 2010: 138-9). Améry's self-styled 'tactless' assault on German consciousness of the Nazi era in his essay *Resentments*, roughly coincided with the conclusion of the Frankfurt trial.

I also want to underline the fact that Améry's profound sense of social disconnection and existential isolation as a survivor, and loss of trust in the world, ultimately represented the cumulative physical and psychological legacy of nearly two years of horrific experiences imprisonment. These included not only his torture, and his time in Auschwitz, but also to the intervening months of his imprisonment in Fort Breendonk, which he described as a 'small concentration camp', originally for Jewish prisoners, but largely during Améry's time there for political prisoners and members of resistance groups. Though he does not deal with this period with in his essays, it is clear that conditions in Fort Breendonk, where Améry was held in solitary confinement from July to November 1943, were brutal, and life threatening - so much so that he attempted to commit suicide during his imprisonment.[43] A report on those conditions compiled by the US Army (Headquarters, 21 Army Group) in December 1944 notes that solitary cells, in which some prisoners, including Améry, were held, often in handcuffs or shackles, measured only 1.95 metres by 1.37 metres and contained only a wooden board for a bed which was kept upright from reveille until bedtime, and a latrine bucket. The prisoners' sole form of exercise was emptying their latrine buckets once a day[44]. Améry's torturer, whom his essay names as 'Lt Praust', but is identified in the Report as 'Lt Prauss', was, the Report notes, 'considered one of the most brutal of the Guards' (Report: 54-5), and was personally responsible for the deaths of many prisoners (ibid. : 46). Prauss is cited in the testimonies of survivors as one of the 'greatest brutes' in the camp, whose 'cruelty passed all belief' along with the Flemish SS guard Wyss (Weiss), who is probably the guard identified by Améry as the 'SS-man Wajs from Antwerp, a repeated murderer and an especially adroit

[43] Améry's suicide attempt is mentioned by Heidelberger-Leonard (Heidelberger-Leonard, 2010: 43).
[44] Report on German Atrocities by Headquarters, 21 Army Group', authored by 'B.L.A., December 1944', archived at The Wiener Holocaust Library, 27 Russell Square, LondonWC1 5DP, Archives Doc 1990.

torturer' in his essay 'Resentments' (Améry, 1999: 70). Thus, it is only by taking into account the three experiences- torture, imprisonment at Fort Breendonk, and Auschwitz- that the full extent of Améry's persecution, his suffering, and hence the incredibility of his ultimate survival can be fully understood.

Finally, I want to emphasize Améry's longstanding dedication to the cause of left-wing social and political activism, beginning with his verbal and physical confrontations with fascist students at Vienna University, and his participation in the unsuccessful 12-15 February 1934 uprising in support of the Republican Defence Corps against the Austrian Clerico-Fascist forces (Heidelberger-Leonard, 2010: 26). As a pamphlet published in English around March 1944 on behalf of the Austrian Freedom Front, whose Brussels group Améry joined, reveals, that group also intended to establish 'guerilla units' of resistance fighters in the Austrian countryside, primarily in the mountains of Tyrol, Carinthia, and Styria, after the example of Tito's Yugoslav partisans.[45]. Unfortunately the stirring portrait of the Front which the pamphlet paints is rather spoiled by Améry's ironically downbeat assessment of his own resistance work, which greatly displeased his former comrades. It involved, he recalled, the production of 'rather primitive agitation material' which he now believed the vast majority of the intended recipients 'merely obediently passed on to their superiors who in turn passed them on to the Gestapo' (Améry, 1999; 24).

Améry's moral and personal courage is thus more than evident. Sidney Rosenfeld, the co-translator of *At the Mind's Limits,* speaks of his' uncompromising ethos of militant humanism', adding that as 'a victim, confronted with the immorality of history,' Améry 'revolted against it, first as a member of the Resistance, then, after the war, a writer-intellectual engagé, in the cause of his fellow victims and the threatened and injured individual altogether' (Améry, 1999: 108). W.G. Sebald also pointed out the courageous nature of Améry's determination to face down the hostile reception to his essays he received from some Germans concerning his depiction of the illegitimacy of German public consciousness of the past, concluding, that:

> Améry is still the only one who denounced the obscenity of a psychologically and socially deformed [German] society, and the outrage of supposing that history could

[45] This document is also available in the Wiener Library, in their Microfilm Archive.

proceed on its way afterwards almost undisturbed, as if nothing had happene' (Sebald, 2003: 158).

Yet the description of Améry's essays which remains uppermost in my mind is that of his fellow survivor, the Hungarian novelist and Nobel prize winner, Imre Kertész, in his 1992 homage to Améry, which emphasises the profundity of their humanism:

> 'Whenever he writes of his alienation, his loss of 'faith in the world', his social loneliness and existential exile, Améry in my view goes beyond the narrowly defined framework of his book and addresses, quite simply, the human condition of the era' (Kertész, 2011: 74).

8.4. Jean Améry: A Story of Torture and Its Legacy

One of the notable features of Améry's account of being tortured and its aftermath in the context of this dissertation is its similarity in some respects with Freedman's later account of being raped and its aftermath. Just as Freedman had been left with a lasting and largely irremediable sense of shame and humiliation at what she remembers as her surrender to her assailant, for example, Améry clearly feels ashamed and humiliated when he remembers, in his essay *Torture*, his 'surrender' to his torturer in the form of his invented, nonsensical 'confession' of his resistance activities, going so far as to suggest that :

'If instead of the aliases [of his co-Résistants] I had been able to name real names, perhaps, or probably, a calamity would have occurred, and I would be standing here now as the weakling I most likely am, and as the traitor I potentially already was' (Améry, 1999: 36).

Speaking of the legacy of those fateful hours, he added: 'It is still not over. Twenty- two years later I am still dangling over the ground with dislocated arms, panting and accusing myself' (ibid).

In the final paragraph of his essay, Améry also offers a much more graphic version of Freedman's 'shattered world view' as a survivor of torture:

> 'Whoever has succumbed to torture can no longer feel at home in the world. The shame of destruction cannot be erased. Trust in the world, which already collapsed in part at the first blow [under interrogation by the Gestapo], but in the end, under torture, fully, will not be regained. That one's fellow man was experienced as the

> antiman remains in the tortured person an accumulated horror. It blocks the view into a world in which the principle of hope rules. One who was martyred is a defenceless prisoner of fear----and also what is called resentments' (ibid. : 40).

These apparent similarities between the psychological and emotional responses of Freedman and Améry are even more noteworthy in the light of the vast difference between the circumstances and nature of their respective experiences and their aftermaths. Améry, for instance, clearly knew what he was getting into as an illegal refugee and former internee working for a resistance organisation in Nazi-occupied Brussels whose members were being actively hunted down by the security forces, and if arrested, would inevitably be tortured. Moreover, whilst Freedman clearly felt a sense of shame, or guilt, about having, as she saw it, *given* her attacker what he wanted, Améry had survived his torture without disclosing to his torturer any genuine information concerning the group's members or operations (albeit because he didn't possess it). Why, then, did Améry insist that his experience was so shameful, humiliating, and personally devastating?

The answer which emerges from Améry's own account is his recognition, perhaps for the first time, how completely and easily his mental, physical and moral powers of resistance had been overwhelmed by the pain of his torture. Heidelberger-Leonard records that in 1945, at the beginning of the short euphoric period that followed his liberation, Améry had written an unpublished 'fragment' of a novel he called 'The Fortress of Derloven', which contained a fictionalised version of his experience, in which his fictional *alter ego*, Althager, is tortured but heroically succeeds in witholding information which might give his comrades away by 'tricking' his torturers with 'fairy tales' - a triumph of mind over body (Heidelberger-Leonard, 2010:150). This is perhaps how he would have liked to *imagine* his own experience, but in writing his 1965 essay his memory had instead retrieved the *reality* of what he had experienced - that he had been traumatized, even before his torture, by his sense of helplessness under the blows of his Gestapo interrogators (which he actually compared to being raped), and subsequently mentally annihilated by the extreme pain of torture. It is, I believe, the indelibility of that memory to which he refers when he declares that 'torture is the most horrible event a human being can retain within himself' (Améry, 1999:22). Even in 1965, it is only after much philosophical discursion that Améry can bring himself to describe, briefly as he can, what actually happened to him in the torture room. His hands are tied

behind his back and fixed to a hook on the end of a chain suspended from a pulley, and his body raised off the floor until he hangs one metre above the ground. He continues:

> In such a position or rather, when hanging this way, with your hands behind your back, for a short time you can hold at a half-oblique through muscular force. During these few minutes, when you are already expending your utmost strength, when sweat has already appeared on your forehead and lips, and you are breathing in gasps, you will not answer any questions. Accomplices? Addresses? Meeting places? You hardly hear it. All your life is gathered in a single limited area of your body, the shoulder joints, and it does not react; for it exhausts itself completely in the expenditure of energy. But this cannot last for long, even with people who have a strong physical constitution. As for me, I had to give up rather quickly. And now there was a crackling (sic) and splintering in my shoulders that my body has not forgotten until this hour. The balls sprang from their sockets. My own body weight caused luxation; I fell into a void and now hung by my dislocated arms, which had been torn high from behind and were now twisted over my head. Torture, from Latin *torquere*, to twist. What visual instruction in etymology! At the same time, the blows from the horsewhip showered down on my body, and some of them sliced cleanly through the light summer trousers that I was wearing on this twenty-third of July, 1943.'(ibid.: 32-3).

Despite what Sebald calls 'this curiously objective' description of the event (Sebald, 2003: 156), there is no doubt that of experience of extreme pain, as well as the rapid destruction of his intellectual and moral powers of resistance, was both profoundly traumatic and indelible. As Améry himself puts it:

> 'The tortured person never ceases to be amazed that all those things one may, according to inclination, call his soul, or his mind, or his consciousness, or his identity, are destroyed when there is that cracking and splintering in the shoulder joints. That life is fragile is a truism he has always known - and that it can be ended, as Shakespeare says, "with a little pin". But only through torture did he learn that a living person can be transformed so thoroughly into flesh and by that, while still alive, be partly made the prey of death' (Améry, 1999 :40).

Améry's suggestion that the experience of extreme pain 'blots out the contradiction of death and allows us to experience it personally' (ibid. :34) is not as fanciful as it may appear; in fact it is supported by the comparison between pain and death contained in Elaine Scarry's well known 1985 study of torture, in her book *The Body in Pain,* in which she observes:

> 'Each [torture and death] only happens because of the body. In each, the contents of consciousness are destroyed. The two are the most intense forms of negation, the purest expression of the anti-human, of annihilation, of total aversiveness---- Regardless, then, of the context in which it occurs, physical pain is always a mock execution.' (Scarry, 1985:31).

Thus the 'curiously objective' and ironic nature of Améry's description of his torture, both Heidelberger-Leonard and Sebald suggest, can be explained by the fact that recollecting and recording his experience had strained his composure to breaking point, and objectivity and irony were simply a means of retaining his self-control, in the face of the emotional strain of that process. The various metaphors and similes with which Améry intersperses his account of his torture, notes Heidelberger-Leonard, 'are nothing but a kind of all-purpose glue because no power of imagination is adequate to verbalize such a monstrous experience' (Heidelberger-Leonard, 2010: 151). Sebald similarly notes that: 'It is as if every fragment of memory touched a sore point, as if [Améry] were compelled to ward off everything immediately and translate it into reflective form to make it measurable by any standard' (Sebald, 2003: 153). Another reason, though, is that Améry recognized the problem of linguistic despair - that describing sensations such as the pain of torture was simply impossible:

> It would be totally senseless to try and describe here the pain that was inflicted on me. Was it "like a red- hot iron in my shoulders," and was another "like a dull wooden stake that had been driven into the back of my head"? One comparison would only stand for the other, and in the end we would be hoaxed by turn on the hopeless merry-go-round of figurative speech. The pain was what it was. Beyond that there is nothing to say. Qualities of feeling are as incomparable as they are indescribable. They mark the limits of language to communicate. (Améry, 1999: 33).

This is by no means an unusual view among victims of torture. As Roger Crisp observes:

> Not (I hope) having been tortured, you might want to ask one of its victims just how bad it is. Unfortunately, it is common for such victims to say that is impossible to convey this badness. Jacobo Timerman, for example, who was tortured in Argentina, said: "In the long months of confinement, I often thought of how to transmit the pain that a tortured person undergoes. And always I concluded that it was impossible. It is pain without points of reference, revelatory symbols, or clues to serve as indicators."(Crisp,2021: 3).

The question remains why Améry's account of his experience, from his initial arrest by the Gestapo to his torture, consistently emphasizes his helplessness and weakness in the face of his captors, and the shame and humiliation which the memory of it provoked in him – why, when it might seem more natural for him to have sought to portray himself in the best light, he deemed it imperative to make his listeners and readers understand that a 'slight pressure by the tool-wielding hand' can turn the victim into 'a shrilly squealing piglet at slaughter', and that unlike the 'unforgettable Jean Moulin', who was tortured to death without breaking his silence, it was probably only luck which had prevented him from betraying his comrades. I believe it was partly because Améry valued truth above everything, and partly because he did not want to reduce the impact on his audience of the horror of his experience, but this is conjecture.

Elaine Scarry's examination of the relational dynamics between the torturer and his victim, though, written twenty years after that of Améry, very much bears out Améry's account of his experience. Scarry notes that the vast majority of acts of torture are not in fact primarily *motivated* by the need to extract information, though torture rarely occurs without some form of interrogation. The torturer rather uses the feigned urgency or significance of the question to 'neutralize the moral fact' of the infliction of intense pain:

> 'In compelling confession, the torturers compel the prisoner to record and objectify the fact that intense pain is world-destroying. It is for this reason that while the content of the prisoner's answer is only sometimes important to the regime, the form of the answer, the fact of his answering, is always crucial' (Scarry,1985: 29).

Consequently, the fact that Améry's absurd, invented 'confession', blurted out purely in a desperate attempt to bring an end to his suffering, appeared perfectly satisfactory to his captors, can be readily explained, on Scarry's account, by the fact that it was the *act of*

confessing, signalling the successful completion of the process of the destruction of his world, rather than the *content* of his confession, that mattered to his torturers. By the same token, what mattered most to Améry about his confession, when he recollected it, is not whether it was true or not, but the fact that he *had* confessed, and thus surrendered to his torturer's will to dominate and destroy him. The fact that he had given his captors useless information, rather than information which might have resulted in the death of numerous comrades, made no difference because it had not been due to his physical or moral courage and quick-wittedness *in extremis*, like that of Althager, but simply good luck.

Améry's account of his loss of trust in the world, though similar in its effect to Freedman's 'shattered world view', is much harder to pin down in terms of causation. Freedman's post-traumatic disconnection from the world appears relatively straightforwardly rooted in the reality that the world had proved to be an unsafe place for her as a woman, and also in the dichotomy between her knowledge of that reality and what she perceives as the generally held belief of societies that the world is only unsafe for women who are insufficiently intelligent and careful. The world, she judges, not only doesn't keep women safe from the threat of sexual violence, but is also reluctant to admit the existence and the extent of that threat, and thus resistant to accepting evidence to the contrary.

Améry's account of his loss of trust in the world, though, is somewhat more elusive. From his own description, the fundamental elements of it do not appear, on the face of it, to be dissimilar to those of Freedman's shattered world view; the experience of the forced violation of body and mind, of his helplessness as a victim, and of the absence of any form of social protection against being violated.[46] It is the last of these elements, though, which is the most problematic. Améry describes the 'trust in the world' he has lost as :

> 'the certainty that by reason of written or unwritten social contracts the other person will spare me- more precisely stated, that he will respect my physical and with it also my metaphysical being. The boundaries of my body are also the boundaries of my self. My skin surface shields me against the external world. If I am to have trust, I must feel on it only what I *want* to feel' (Améry, 1999: 28).

[46] Of course, although neither Freedman nor Améry were in the strict sense members of the society in which the violation occurred, she undoubtedly had social and legal rights to be protected ,as a *bona fide* visitor from her home country, whereas he, as an illegal alien actively resisting the *de facto* rulers of the country, did not.

Améry's expectation of social protection though seems rather at odds not only with the circumstances of his arrest and torture, but his entire existence since the day in September 1935 when he concluded that being three-quarters Jewish had made him a 'dead man on leave, someone to be murdered, who only by chance was not yet where he properly belonged' (ibid. :86). Moreover whatever written or unwritten social contract may have existed between him and Austrian society, it had been irreversibly broken in 1938. Indeed, by 1943 he had already been forced to flee for his life into exile, been twice interned as an alien in France and escaped, and had then returned to Brussels where he had been compelled to live illegally in hiding for two years. Moreover, he had become a resistance fighter, and thus an enemy of the Third Reich in that capacity as well as being a Jew, and what is more one that specifically exposed him to the known, and high, risk of arrest and torture. Zolkos (2010) suggests that Améry's notion of trust in the world as expressed in his essay is in fact closer to the post-war continental philosophical notion of 'being with the Other'- not an assumption of the 'certainty of contractual or reciprocal non-infringement between the Other and the self,' but rather trust that the Other will not act towards me 'from the premise of violence' (Zolkos, 2010: 56). This, however, seems just as much at odds with the facts of Améry's situation. The explanation of Améry's declaration which seems to me to be the most plausible is that he was unconsciously folding into his account what was in reality a much wider loss of trust in the world, by conflating the psychological legacy of his torture with as yet unwritten, but perhaps already contemplated, legacy of his experience as a Jewish survivor of the Holocaust. This interpretation is in fact supported by Améry's own confession, in his Preface to the First Edition of his book, that when he wrote his essay on his torture 'it was unclear to me what significance should be given to the concept of dignity…..whereas later, in the essay on my Jewishness, I believed to recognize that dignity is the right to live granted by society'. He also said that it was only in the process of writing his final essay that he came to finally *see himself* as a specifically Jewish victim (Améry, 1999: xiv). Perhaps then, although he had not yet consciously processed the connection at the time of writing his essay on his experience of torture, he was already thinking of his loss of trust in the world in a much wider context than that of his torture.

In fact, an important underlying distinction between Freedman's experience and that of Améry is that between the experience of personally directed psychopathic violence and

institutionally directed systemic violence. Thus, whilst it was the demonic appearance of her attacker which, as she recalls it, was most firmly imprinted on Freedman's mind, it was the ordinariness of Améry's captors which, as he recalls it, was imprinted on his mind. It began, he said, when it dawned on him that 'amazingly', whilst those who arrested him wore leather coats and carried pistols, as he had imagined they would, they did not, as he had imagined the would, have 'Gestapo faces', with 'twisted noses, hypertrophied chins, pockmarks and knife scars'; just plain ordinary faces, like everyone else (ibid: 25). His interrogators, and later his torturers, he said, were not just psychopathically dis-ordered individuals (though that may also have been the case) but 'bureaucrats of torture'- servants of *de facto* rulers, carrying out their 'ordinary business', which happened to include the torture and destruction of its enemies. More than that, said Améry, the Nazi torturer, or 'antiman', embodied the *essence* of National Socialism itself; it was in torture, he said, that the Third Reich 'materialized in all the density of its being' (ibid. :30). The torture practised by 'Hitler vassals' such as Lt. Praust, he argued, though clearly similar in kind to that practised by torturers in other oppressive régimes both before and after the Third Reich, had not, as in other cases, been carried out in the service of any 'idea of man'-, such as a religious or ideological philosophy, however irrational or cruelly enforced. His torturers wanted rather, through annihilating their victims, simply to annihilate the decent and just world they represented. The Nazi torturer, Améry argued, thus constituted the *apotheosis* of National Socialism because his sadism was of an *existential* rather than a psycho-sexual or socially pathological kind, and thus not only evidenced his own depravity, but the depravity of those he served. Ultimately, then, Améry's depiction of his loss of trust in the world as a victim of torture is that of a loss of trust in an entire concept of society:

> 'Amazed, the tortured person experienced that in this world there can be the other as absolute sovereign, and sovereignty revealed itself as the power to inflict suffering and to destroy. The dominion of the torturer over his victim has nothing in common with the power exercised on the basis of social contracts, as we know it. It is not the power of the traffic policeman over the pedestrian, of the tax official over the taxpayer, of the first lieutenant over the second lieutenant. It is not the sacral sovereignty of past absolute chieftains or kings, for even if they stirred fear, they were also objects of trust at the same time. The king could be terrible in his wrath, but also

kind in his mercy; his autocracy was an exercise of authority. But the power of the torturer, under which the tortured person moans, is nothing other than the triumph of the survivor over the one who is plunged from the world into agony and death' (ibid. :39-40).

Améry's fellow survivor Imre Kertész, though, was not convinced by Améry's insistence on his torture having a quintessentially National Socialist character. Kertesz notes that Améry's world view was first and foremost that of a German writer and philosopher, and that consequently in his mind the outrage was felt first and foremost as one specifically perpetrated by German Nazism. Kertész himself, on the other hand, who experienced both Nazi persecution as an inmate of Auschwitz and Buchenwald, and subsequently Soviet oppression in post-war Hungary, argues that torture was equally the essence of the 'hammer and sickle' totalitarian state, and 'of every absolute raised to the level of the state, every dictatorship that swells power to autocracy' (Kertész, 2011; 69).[47] Perhaps Améry truly thought otherwise, or perhaps he was pursuing his stated didactic imperative of revealing to his German audience 'the darkest and at the same time most characteristic deeds of the Third Reich' (Améry, 1999: xiv).

In any event, it seems evident that the worlds in which Freedman and Améry lost their trust were very different. This makes the similarities between their respective experiences of living with survival - the residual sense of shame and humiliation, of being isolated and alienated not only personally but also socially by their inability to feel secure in the world, and of swimming against a social tide of scepticism, and even hostility in revealing their experiences – even more remarkable. Freedman, I feel, would certainly concur with Améry's conclusion that 'The experience of persecution was, at the very bottom, that of extreme *loneliness'* (Améry, 1999:70).

Améry, though, had been forced to confront one very significant existential consequence of survival which Freedman did not have to face, which was the loss not only of his homeland,

[47] In Kertész, 2011: 57-78. Originally an essay written in Hungarian and entitled *A Holocaust mint kultúra,* delivered in 1992 as part of the Jean Améry Symposium at the University of Vienna. In a thought-provoking aside, Kertesz speculates that living in Communist Hungary after 1945 may have actually saved him from committing suicide as a consequence of his wartime experiences, as was to be the fate of Améry, Primo Levi, Paul Celan and many other survivors in Western countries, because it allowed him to reclaim his Hungarian identity as one of millions of 'prisoners' of Soviet communism, rather than remaining an outsider. Surviving one's survival, he concluded, could thus actually be more difficult in a 'free' society, than in a totalitarian one.

but also every determinant of what he had previously believed had constituted his personal and social identity. Not only had he lost his home, but also his people and his language (the regional dialect he had grown up speaking as his mother tongue), and had chosen a life of permanent exile, rather than seek to return, or build what he considered to be an inauthentic life elsewhere. Consequentially, the existential and moral chasm between Améry and his world was significantly wider than that between Freedman and her world.

8.6 Language and Narrativization

I briefly introduced the issue of the importance or reading catastrophe testimony in a particularist context in Section 8.1 above, including recognizing the different narrative forms in which catastrophe testimony may be produced, and the differences between the works of Freedman and Améry are an excellent illustration two very different approaches to presenting catastrophe testimony. Freedman's account is an excellent example of what Améry would describe as a 'documentary' account : a straightforward, factually informative, yet intimate and unflinching, step by step account of what was a clearly a horrific, terrifying, degrading and life-threatening encounter with a psychopathic assailant, and its aftermath. It is set both within the context of a chronologically ordered account of her life as a victim and survivor from the date of her rape up to the time of writing her account of it, and a wider, academically informed, philosophical discussion of trauma and recovery, and the social attitudes towards sexual violence towards women. Her declared objective is not only to tell her own trauma story, but also to inspire other victims of sexual violence to confront and externalize their own experiences, and to radically challenge the social perception of victims of sexual violence as bearers of a shameful 'dirty secret' (Freedman, 2014: Prologue, viii-xii). Her language is clear and consistent with that of someone on the road, if not to recovery, then at least to successfully managing her condition.

Améry's account, on the other hand, is radically different. Apart for those significant differences between him and Freedman, and their respective experiences, previously examined, Améry was at the time of writing his essays an experienced and stylistically refined cultural and political commentator, to whom the reflective, literary, form of the essay was a natural medium. He was also addressing a very particular audience, and intent on making his mark not only as a survivor but also as a writer. At the same time his essays bear often painful witness to a first unaided and unmediated attempt to articulate and externalize his

own trauma story in an era in which psychotherapeutic theory and clinical practices relating the treatment of chronic post-traumatic psychological disorders were in a comparatively primitive state of development. As he candidly confessed in his Preface to the first published edition of his essays, it was only in the process of writing an account of his experience of torture and the other traumas of his life as a victim and survivor of the Third Reich, that he actually began to understand his own existential condition. In his essay on torture, as in his later essays, he is continuously grappling with a complex 'ebb and flow' presentational methodology, interweaving what he called 'personal confession' with passages of incidental philosophical reflection that he referred to in his Preface as 'meditation', but which are frequently more passionate and emotive than that term implies, wanting to win over his audience, yet at the same time keep them at arm's length and pinned in a moral corner. And, unlike Freedman, he has no story of healing or recovery to offer his audience, whether personal or societal. On the contrary, as the original German title of his book- 'Beyond Guilt and Atonement'- infers, he is writing against the very possibility of recovery or healing, which in his case would mean surrendering to social pressures to forgive and forget past atrocities, and 'move on'. An essential difference between Freedman and Améry in this respect is that notwithstanding Freedman's distress and anger concerning social attitudes towards her as a rape survivor, it was at least accepted that a serious crime had been committed against her by her attacker for which he was criminally tried and punished. Moreover, despite her sense of social disconnection she remained an existential and social insider, and thus able to seek to recover her lost personal and social dignity within a generally supportive legal and social environment. Améry, on the other hand, was the victim of a number of crimes which, at the time he suffered them, the German people and the wider world were largely reluctant to punish, and sometimes even recognize, not least because of their magnitude. Améry had only become legally and socially designated as victim of crime as a consequence of post-war multilateral legislative and social initiatives, but as the German title of his book clearly flagged, they were not seemingly crimes for which the vast majority of the members of post-war German society were prepared to take any personal or even historical responsibility. As he said in his essay 'On the Necessity and Impossibility of Being a Jew', 'I was unable to force yesterday's murderers and tomorrow's potential aggressors to recognize the moral truth of their crimes because the world, in its totality, did not help me to do it', adding that his

individual attempts to persuade contemporary Germans to recognize that truth always seemed to 'dissolve in polemics' (Améry, 1999; 96).

The language of Améry's essays is thus a reflection of the state of mind in which he found himself at that time of writing them; an unapologetic turbulent, sometimes angry and sometimes despairing text in which passages of philosophical or socio-political reflection seem to serve at least in part as periods of emotional respite both for him and his audience from the relentless criticism of himself and them, and in which, at times of the greatest emotional pressure he seeks refuge in euphemism and metaphor. As Sebald points out, the engine which powered Améry's prose was 'implacable resentment' concerning the past, and resistance to those who sought to concretize it as history:

> One of the most impressive aspects of Améry's stance as a writer is that although he knew the real limits of the power to resist as few others did, he maintains the validity of resistance, even to the point of absurdity. Resistance without any confidence that it will be effective, resistance *quand même*, out of a principle of solidarity with victims, and as a deliberate affront to those who simply let the stream of history sweep them along, is the essence of Améry's philosophy (Seebald, 2003: 159-60).

8.7 Summary and Observations

Freedman's experience of rape and Améry's experience of torture both involved deliberate and extremely violent assaults against their person which they were helpless to prevent. Otherwise the differences between their experiences, and their responses to them, could hardly have been greater. Yet comparing them underlines the fact that, despite these differences, the psychic, emotional and social legacies of their experiences were similar in three important respects. The first is the feeling of shame and humiliation at their helplessness in the face of the brutal invasion of their minds and bodies - at having *surrendered*, as they saw it, to their assailant. The second is their post-traumatic loss of trust in the world, though that loss of trust was differently constituted, and manifested itself in different ways. The third is the existential and moral chasm between them and the post-traumatic societies they inhabited, caused by their 'sad privilege' of knowing the full horror of what had happened and might happen again, and the impossibility of conveying the felt experience of their ordeal to those who had not suffered similarly, and thus fully recovering their dignity and reclaiming their social status.

A critical element of Améry's existential condition as a survivor which differentiates him not only from Freedman, but also from his fellow concentration camp survivors Delbo, Levi and Kluger, is his decision not only not to return to his former homeland, for quite understandable reasons, but also not to seek to emigrate to a new homeland and rebuild his life. He chose, instead, unusually, to remain living in permanent exile in Belgium, which had been the site both of his arrest, torture, and deportation to Auschwitz, and also where his wife had died whilst in hiding, during his time in Auschwitz.[48] Thus his narrative 'existence' as a writer seems in this sense to have followed his existence in real life. Consequently, when Heidelberger-Leonard succinctly observes of his essays that Améry 'unerringly follows his own idiosyncratic path through every individual question raised, a path where only what he has experienced and his introspection have the last word, with a subjectivity that is never satisfied', she might equally have been describing his attitude to survival more generally (Heidelberger-Leonard, 2010:169). Freedman, was therefore able to contemplate, and seek to recover from, her post-catastrophic struggle for survival at a distance from the scene of the crime, and as a self-identified existential insider. Améry, on the other hand, was still thinking through, and living his struggle, even as he wrote about it from his place of self-imposed exile. Brussels was both the site of a crucial part of his traumatic journey and a daily reminder of his status as an existential outsider, and the distance which lay between him and the identity he was longing to reclaim: that of a German intellectual and writer. And that, presumably, is how he wanted it.

One consolation that Freedman and Améry might, however, have been able to share, if they had ever been in a position to exchange accounts of their experiences, is that by assaulting them in an intensely personal way, their assailants had at least been required to acknowledge their individuality, even if the objective of their actions had been to degrade, objectify, and dehumanize them. Victims of intended collective atrocities such as those held prisoner in internment or concentration camps, on the other hand (including of course Améry himself), received minimal, or no, individual recognition from their assailants, beyond that of being identified by a badge, a star, or a number, as someone to be particularly abused or degraded,

[48] Améry 's wife Regina had died during his time in Auschwitz, whilst in hiding in Brussels, as the result of a heart attack. He began a relationship with his eventual second wife, Maria, after his liberation, and lived with her for the remainder of his life. A detailed account of his post-war existence as a person and a writer can be found in Heidelberger-Leonard (2010).

or more easily murdered. The apogee of such experiences of depersonalisation and dehumanization must surely be those which occurred in the Auschwitz 'work' camps, like Monowitz, where the extermination of the inmates, literally by working them to death, was not only the consequence of the camp's regime, but its *raison d'être*. How this might have affected the nature of the psychological trauma prisoners experienced, their suffering as victims, or their existential condition as survivors, is a key question to be addressed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 9. HOW SURVIVORS SEE THEMSELVES AND THE WORLD: AUSCHWITZ AND OTHER CAMPS

9.1 Introduction

There are many places of communal suffering in the world. Even if one narrows them down to places of captivity, the choice remains depressingly large: prisons, detention centres, internment camps, including concentration camps, and less formal situations in which victims are held in collective captivity - as hostages for ransom, as political bargaining chips, or as sex slaves, for example. Those whose testimonies are featured in this chapter survived one of the most horrific experiences of collective captivity in recorded history - imprisonment in Auschwitz as well as other Nazi concentration or work camps - and thus in testifying to their own experiences and those of others, they were discharging a very heavy historical and moral responsibility. Primo Levi , for example, doubted his moral authority as a survivor to speak of the fate of the so-called *Müsselmanner* -those of his fellow prisoners whose physical and spiritual strength declined to the point that they lost the will to survive and let death 'drown' them. Yet if he had not given the world his testimony, how much would have been known about them or about the fate of the relatively tiny number of Italian prisoners in Auschwitz? Levi records that of the convoy of 650 people, including himself, which left the Fossoli detention camp for Auschwitz, only 125 people (96 men and 29 women) were sent to work in Monowitz and other satellite work camps, the remainder being gassed on arrival, and of those 125 people only three, including himself, survived. Who would have spoken for the dead Italians if Levi had not done so? How would we have known, but for his testimony, that the it was the inability of most Italians in Monowitz to speak or understand German, and thus swiftly comply with the orders of the SS, that led to them being treated more harshly, and being less able to equip themselves with essential survival skills, than other prisoners, and thus to survive for shorter periods (Levi, 1989: 72)?

Choosing which survivor testimonies to feature in this dissertation has therefore not been an easy task. They are the testimonies of just four people, selected from many extraordinary accounts of suffering and survival, all written by truly exceptional human beings. I have chosen them partly because they have had a particular impact on my own thinking in relation to the issues I discuss, and partly because I have tried to present as broad a picture of the

experience of Auschwitz and other camps as possible. To this end, I have selected authors who arrived there from different places, at different ages, from different backgrounds, and who offer different perspectives on their experience of victimhood and survival. Their testimonies were also written at different times during the testifier's existence as a survivor, from the immediate aftermath of liberation to fifty years after the event. What links them as testifiers, beyond their status as former prisoners in Auschwitz and other camps, is what I perceive to be a common desire to offer their readers, beyond an autobiographical account of their own existence, intellectual and moral insights concerning the existential condition of being a victim and survivor of one of the most extreme, if not the most extreme, catastrophic experiences of the modern era.

I begin with the poignant, lyrical and emotive, yet brutally honest and unsparing, testimony of Charlotte Delbo, born 1913, a French, non-Jewish, resistance worker who was arrested in Paris in March 1942, together with her husband and fellow resistance worker Georges Dudach. Following her husband's execution by firing squad, and after spending several further months in prison, Delbo was deported in January 1943 to Auschwitz, as one of a group of non-Jewish women arrested for anti-German political activities. She remained in the Auschwitz satellite camp Raisko until January 1944, when she was sent to Ravensbrück, where she remained until the end of the war. The second author is one of the best known Auschwitz survivors, Primo Levi, an Italian Jew captured by the Fascist militia as a member of a partisan group in December 1943. Levi was deported to Auschwitz-Monowitz in February 1944 and remained there until liberated by the Russians in January 1945, the camp having been been abandoned by the SS some days earlier, and Levi and other prisoners who were too ill to join the 'death march' towards Germany left to die. Levi's account of his experience of Auschwitz is contained in his widely acclaimed book *Se questo un uomo,* translated into English under the title *If This is A Man ,*(or, in the American edition, *Survival in Auschwitz*), written shortly after his liberation and originally published in 1947, but republished to far greater acclaim in 1958, and thereafter translated into several languages, including German. Levi's other work examined in this chapter is his essayistic work *I Sommersi e i salvati*, written in 1986 and translated into English under the title *The Drowned and the Saved.* The third survivor featured in this chapter is Jean Améry whose story has already been briefly recounted. The last author featured is Ruth Kluger, whose memoir *Landscapes of Memory*,

was not written until more than fifty years after her survival. Kluger was a Jewish- Austrian poet, writer and academic, born in 1931, who was deported from Vienna to Theresienstadt in 1942 with her mother. She was eventually sent from Theresienstadt to the Theresienstadt Family Camp in Auschwitz-Birkenau in May 1944, before being sent to the Christianstadt forced labour camp, in Lower Silesia, six weeks later. She eventually escaped with her mother in February 1945 during a forced march westwards from the abandoned labour camp, and surreptitiously joined the procession of members of the former German population of Lower Silesia fleeing from the advancing Russian army. Her story of victimhood and survival is especially extraordinary in the light of her age at the time. All of the works cited above reveal some aspects of the epistemological, existential and moral chasm between their authors and the world, but, as will be seen, very different responses to their situation.

9.2 Charlotte Delbo: A Sisterhood of Pain, Loss and Comradeship

Charlotte Delbo's best known work in English translation, *Auschwitz and After* (1995) comprises a trilogy of works: *None of Us Will Return* (*Aucune de nous ne reviendra*), written in 1946, but not published until 1965, *Useless Knowledge* (*Une connaissance inutile*), written in 1946/7 but not published until 1970, and *The Measure of our Days (Mesure de nos jours*), published in 1970. In addition, I will draw on her last work, *Days and Memory* (*La mémoire et les jours*), published in 1985, the year of her death, in which Delbo retrospectively addresses her experience of surviving Auschwitz, and particularly the issue of remembering a traumatic past.

In his valuable Introduction to *Auschwitz and After*, Lawrence Langer notes that one of Delbo's favourite expressions was '*Il faut donner à voir'*, which he translates as 'they must be made to see'[49]. As Langer points out her objective is to reveal to her readers 'the way it really was' - to 'explain the inexplicable'. She neither eschews physical descriptions of her experiences, as Améry does, nor attempts to treat them in a measured, or objective way, like Levi, but confronts the reader with the full horror of them.

[49]Jennifer Geddes alternatively suggests 'I want to make it seen', or 'I want to make them see' (Geddes, 2003: 114, fn.2).

Delbo's concept of traumatic memory, and the divided self, is particularly pertinent to this dissertation. In *Days and Memory*, she uses the analogy of a snake shedding its skin to describe how her Auschwitz self and her survivor self have come to be separately represented in her mind during her life as a survivor. As a survivor, she recalls, she managed after a few years to shed her Auschwitz 'skin', as a snake would shed its old skin, after growing what she hoped would be an impermeable new existential skin in which she could present herself as a survivor to the world. Her new skin enclosed a 'common memory' of Auschwitz- an episodic and semantic memory through which her experience of Auschwitz could be re- presented to those who had never experienced it as part of her past life. Unlike in the case of a snake, however, Delbo found that her old skin remained alive 'next to her' and continued to enclose her internalized 'deep memory' of her Auschwitz experiences, rather than shrivelling and dying. For as long as the old skin remained intact, its deep memory contents would not spill out and disturb her life as a survivor, and she knew she would be able to continue recollecting her experience of Auschwitz exclusively via her common memory. But she found that, though the old skin was tough, it sometimes gave way, revealing the contents of her deep memory, usually in nightmarish dreams over which her consciousness had no power, and in which the past recurred not in words but in the form of sensory imprints of her original pain and suffering, which lasted until she cried out and woke herself back into consciousness. And after each such episode, Delbo says, she found that she needed to wait some days, until the skin around her deep memory, and thus her Auschwitz self, hardened and became impermeable once more, so that she was once again able to speak of Auschwitz without exhibiting any anxiety or emotion, in language provided by her common memory, as opposed to reliving them. Delbo's attempt to circumvent the existential and moral chasm between her Auschwitz self and the world by creating a new survivor self, and linking that self to the world instead, though successful to an extent, had failed to seal off the unconscious memorial bridge from her present self to her Auschwitz self. The negative forces of trauma, in other words, had proved more powerful than the generativist powers of memory.

The capacity for such self-reflective analysis, however, only comes after many years of experience, and in 1946/7, when Delbo wrote *None of Us Will Return, and Useless Knowledge,* her mood was far from reflective – her only imperative was to make others understand the reality of what she and her comrades had endured. The form and language of these works is

very different from that of Améry or Levi - Langer describes it as a 'unique blend of poetry and prose, resulting in a lyrical rendering of atrocity that is alarmingly beautiful, an aesthetics of agitation.' (Delbo,1995: xvi). In *None of Us Will Return*, in particular, which comprises a series of anecdotal and poetic portrayals of the daily horrors of existence in Auschwitz, Delbo, Langer notes, 'shuns the narrative impulse, with its dependence on reflection, and forges instead a remarkable style of direct confrontation that lures us into the maelstrom of atrocity whilst simultaneously drowning all intellectual defences' (ibid. : xiv). The following is an extract from a piece entitled 'Thirst', for example in which, Delbo describes the perennial thirst she felt upon wakening in her barracks:

> Upon wakening in the morning, lips move but no sound comes out. Anguish fills your whole being, an anguish as gripping as that of dreams. Is this what it means to be dead? Lips try to speak but the mouth is paralyzed. A mouth cannot form words when it is dry, with no saliva. And the gaze drifts off, it is an insane gaze. The others say, "She's mad. She's gone mad during the night". They summon words capable of recalling reason. An explanation is owed them, but lips decline to move. The muscles of the mouth want to attempt articulation and do not articulate. Such is the despair of the powerlessness that grips me, the full awareness of the state of being dead (ibid. :70).

This is what Delbo means when she says she wants to 'make her readers see' - to draw them immediately and unreflectively into the brutal and dehumanizing reality of her victimhood. In this, her narrative impulses are quite distinct from those of Améry and Levi, which is especially noteworthy in the case of the latter, whose book *If This Is a Man* was being written around the same time as the material published in Delbo's *None of Us Will Return*, and *Useless Knowledge*. Levi, too, I feel, wanted to 'make them see', but in his own quite different way. Regrettably, there is insufficient space in this dissertation to fully explore Delbo's idiosyncratic narrativization of her experience, and since I would categorize everything in these two works either as poetry or prose poetry , trying to paraphrase them would be both difficult and questionable, but hopefully a few further illustrations can convey at least some sense of her witnessing style.

The first is taken from the first of her 'vignettes' of Auschwitz (the term is apposite, even if its delicacy grates upon one's senses, in the light of the subject matter), which are found in *None of Us Will Return*, which is entitled 'Arrivals, Departures'. It describes the arrival of deportees at the infamous Auschwitz ramp 'where those who arrive are those who are leaving' (ibid. 3). Her account illustrates her ability to convey the unimaginably horrific nature of the camp's 'logic of destruction', to borrow Améry's phrase, in a few selected images. She describes some of the arrivals in terms which emphasise their unpreparedness for the horror which is about to engulf them: a rabbi who 'holds himself straight, heading the line. He has always been a model for the rest' (ibid. :6), two sisters who 'went out for a stroll and never got back for dinner' (Ibid. :7), and a group of boarding school girls in identical uniforms 'holding hands, unaware, as though on a regular Thursday school outing' (ibid.). In a short time, all, or virtually all of them will be gassed and their bodies burned. The matching pleated skirts of the boarding school girls will be worn again, but this time as the 'uniform' of members of the Auschwitz orchestra playing the Viennese waltzes which the camp Commandant likes so much. The orchestra also plays the marches which accompany the prisoners as they leave for work in the fields where they will be screamed at, kicked, beaten and brutalised all day, and greets those who have survived the day and returned to the camp in the evening.

Another vignette, 'One Day', is a shocking, yet poetic, account of the murder of a Jewish female prisoner on one of Delbo's work gangs, and an illustration of what Delbo means by her insistence that readers must be made to see the reality of Auschwitz. The woman, driven crazy by thirst, abandons her labour and madly descends a snowy embankment to eat the cleaner snow at the bottom, thus breaking the rule imposed by the SS, before eventually dragging herself back up the bank, with the help of another prisoner, to where an SS guard, with a dog is waiting for her. Delbo continues:

> The woman moves forward. She seems to be obeying an order….The SS has his dog on a leash. Did he give an order, make a sign? The dog pounces on the woman- without panting, growling, barking. All is silent as in a dream. The dog leaps on the woman, sinks its fangs into her neck. And we do not stir, stuck in some kind of viscous substance which keeps us from making the slightest gesture - as in a dream. The woman lets out a cry. A wrenched-out scream. A single scream tearing through the immobility of the plain. We do not know if the scream has been uttered by her or by

us, whether it issued from her punctured throat, or from ours. I feel the dog's fangs in my throat. I scream. I howl. Not a sound comes out of me. The silence of a dream.

The plain. The snow. The plain.

The woman collapses. One last palpitation and that's all. Something snaps. The head in muddy snow is nothing but a stump. The eyes dirty wounds…..

The SS pulls on his leash. The dog lets go. There is some blood on his muzzle. The SS whistles softly under his breath as he leaves. (ibid: 28-9).

This is just one traumatic experience among many she describes. Another is the 'selection' run, in which the women of her block are forced to participate after an exhausting day of forced labour, and following which the fourteen women who 'fail' the test are taken away and murdered. Many of these stories concern events in Block 25 of the camp barracks, which was the block to which prisoners whom the SS determined, for whatever reason, were no longer fit to live were taken, and from which they were sent to the gas chambers. In one account, *Farewell*, Delbo describes the departure of one such vehicle. The prisoners , who have been howling to the heavens, have been thrown into the trucks and fall silent. One of them looks at the female SS guard, Drexler with hate and a 'scorn that should kill'. Drexler watches them depart: 'she waves a farewell and laughs. She is laughing. And for a long time she keeps on waving goodbye' (ibid. :51). In another vignette entitled, 'Sunday', the women are lined up and forced to run some distance, under the whips and lashes of the guards, with their aprons filled with earth, empty the earth, then repeat the process. Ostensibly it is to make a garden at the camp entrance, but it is also another selection, and Delbo recalls feeling sorry for the Jewish women who are handicapped by their more cumbersome clothing, and try to hide themselves among the other prisoners to avoid being singled out for beatings and lashings by the guards. Some prisoners who fall are dragged into Block 25, and one Jewish woman, her will to live finally extinguished, actually asks to go inside. The torture continues until the SS are satisfied with the level of the soil in the new garden.

Finally, here is a short untitled post-liberation poem, in which, it seems to me, Delbo is already sensing, at a very early stage in France's post-war re-imagining of itself, both the

stubborn survival of the old, Catholic France and an indifference to the stories of those who have returned, and the fate of those who did not:

> You who have wept two thousand years
>
> for one who agonized for three days and three nights
>
> what tears have you left
>
> for those who agonized
>
> for more than three hundred nights and far more than three hundred days
>
> how hard
>
> shall you weep for those who agonized through so many agonies and they were countless
>
> They did not believe in the resurrection to eternal life
>
> And knew you would not weep
>
> (ibid. :10)

None of Us Will Return, though, reveals at least one aspect of the experience of Auschwitz in a more positive light than Levi or Améry, and that is in Delbo's account of the solidarity, and mutual help and support she found among the female prisoners in her barracks. In her vignette 'Morning', she recalls how her physical and mental condition deteriorated at one stage to the point when her friends believed, probably correctly, that she was sinking into madness, and she was becoming increasingly attracted to the prospect of death. Though she could remember nothing of that period herself, Delbo found out later that her companions, and especially her comrade Viva, had saved her from herself by constantly 'slapping her into life'. She also recalled how, on one occasion, though exhausted after the day's labour, the women had insisted on carrying the body of two dead comrades back from the fields to the camp , and thus giving them a modicum of dignity in death. Delbo also speaks movingly of a communal spirit of defiance among the members of her group; though constantly tempted to give in to death, they not only struggled against it, but helped others to do so, in part so as not to give the guards the satisfaction of seeing them die. One important tool for survival,

Delbo reveals in her vignette entitled 'Lulu', was talking to one's comrades about one's plans for going home, since those who stopped believing they were going home were 'as good as dead': 'One had to lend to this possible return home certainty, reality and color by preparing for it, conjuring up each and every detail' she recalls (ibid. :102) There is no dwelling in Delbo's account, on the other hand, on the female equivalent of the figure of the Müsselmann, though there must have been many women in the camp who were similarly diminished. To a great extent this ethos of camaraderie and mutual help is attributable to the strength of the 'sisterhood' of Delbo's particular group, who, like most of those who had been deported to Auschwitz in her convoy, were Communists and thus political prisoners, rather than members of Jewish or other ethnic groups, and bound together by their shared history and ethic of resistance. Being political prisoners also materially enhanced their prospects of survival, compared to those of 'common' prisoners from a range of different national, cultural, political and religious backgrounds who found themselves with nothing in common other than a shared racial or ethnic fate.

The second part of Delbo's trilogy, *Useless Knowledge*, mainly concerns the period leading up to her liberation, but is notable for two poems at the end. The first untitled poem is about the uselessness of self-knowledge in Auschwitz. Useless, and also incompatible with survival:

I know myself through and through

a knowledge

born from the depths of despair

You find out soon enough

you should not speak with death

for it is useless knowledge….

it is far better to know nothing

if you wish to go on living (ibid. :225).

The last poem is entitled 'Prayer to the Living to Forgive Them for Being Alive', in which Delbo tells those who are once more free to live and love that those who died for their freedom will not forgive them if they waste the remainder of their lives. Do *something*, she urges them, something to justify your existence and your right to carry on enjoying life, and thus their sacrifice. At the same time, she repeats her earlier injunction to herself to unlearn what she has learned in the world beyond knowledge 'for otherwise I clearly see/I can no longer live' (ibid. :230).

The final part of Delbo's trilogy, *The Measure of our Days*, published 25 years after her return, is about her experience, and that of her former comrades, of survival. Delbo writes of the ways in which she and the other survivors among her former comrades have managed, or failed to manage, the task of post-traumatic existence. The vignettes in this part seem to be based on actual conversations or other exchanges, though whether, and how far, these have been narrativized by Delbo is unclear. Her own story of survival is given in another untitled poem, in which she describes herself as facing life 'as though facing a dress/ I can no longer wear'. She ends that poem by recalling the time when a child spontaneously gave her a flower in Sicily and asked her for a kiss:

> There is no wound that will not heal
>
> I told myself that day
>
> And still repeat it from time to time
>
> But not enough to believe it
>
> (ibid. :241).

There is no doubt that Delbo struggled, like so many others, with the problem of surviving survival. She confesses to being unable to prevent herself from scrutinizing the faces of everyone she encounters in her daily life, wondering whether or not they would have helped her to survive in Auschwitz, and usually deciding that they wouldn't, though she knows it is a stupid game. It marks the distance between her and them, and also her distrust of the world. As a former political, rather than Jewish prisoner, who has returned to Paris and become a respected writer, one might perhaps have expected this sense of disconnection to have been

much less , say, than that of Améry, or even Levi, but that does not appear to be the case for her, or for her fellow survivors. Reading their stories, one realises that it is the *experience* of the concentration camp, and especially a death camp, which both creates the epistemological, existential and moral chasm and ensures its unbridgeability, whatever the background of the survivor. Jorge Semprun, the renowned Spanish author, screenwriter and politician, lived most of his life in France, and was, like Delbo, a resistance fighter and Communist, arrested by the Gestapo and deported to Buchenwald in 1943, and like her, survived and returned to France. He said of his experience:

> You don't need a concentration camp to know Evil. But here, the experience will turn out to have been crucial, and massive, invading everywhere, devouring everything….the essential thing about the experience of Evil is that it will turn out to have been lived as the experience of death….and I do mean experience…..We lived it…..We are not survivors, but ghosts, revenants. (Semprun,1997: 88-9).

This sense of living a spectral existence is similarly present in the stories of survival Delbo records. One of Delbo's fellow survivors with whom she communicated is Mado. Mado finds that though she always wanted a chance to survive in order to 'say what she had to say', there is nothing she can say, because the very fact she is alive seems to deny what she has to say: 'Nothing can fill the abyss between other people and myself, between myself and myself. Nothing can bridge this gulf, nor narrow it' (ibid. :259). She tries to explain to others what it was like in Auschwitz, largely out of a sense of duty to those who died there , feeling that her return must assume some meaning so that their death shall not have been in vain, but cannot make her listeners understand. 'Isn't it terrible', she says of her dead comrades, 'they died believing that they were dying just before the birth of a dazzling truth?' (ibid. :261). She feels guilty, despite knowing it is not her fault, feels that she has cheated the dead and betrayed herself- 'It is *within us* that nothing is the same'. The people around her, including her son, seem peripheral to her life. They want her to forget the past, but cannot understand it is impossible: ' Our loyalty to our comrades we left back there is all we have. In any event forgetting is out of the question….time will not pass'. Memories will always return 'borne by a taste, a color, the sound of the wind, the rain' (ibid. :266). Her husband is tactful, because he thinks he knows how she feels, but she has never tried to make him understand how she really feels because it would make him realize that all his caring had failed to alleviate her

pain. What she really feels is that even *having* a husband and a son is abnormal, that the passage of time cannot undo anything. And so she goes on not living: 'I died in Auschwitz', she declares, 'but no one knows it' (ibid. :267).

Delbo's other portraits of her former comrades record similar failed attempts to reintegrate into 'normal life', exacerbated by the inability of friends and family to understand the existence, or nature, of their post-traumatic psychic disorder. Ida, who was sent to Auschwitz at the age of fourteen returns and marries Charles, who was not sent to a camp, has a baby girl, and seems to be rebuilding her life, before breaking down, and having a panic attack during which she jumps out of a window, and is seriously injured. The doctors treat this as a suicide attempt, the cause of which they and she believe they have 'cured', but despite living mainly happily thereafter, she continues to suffers periodic anxiety attacks when the Auschwitz 'ghost' returns, and then she has to go back to the clinic. Another former comrade, Poupette, found those around her insensitive to the way in which her physical resources and health have been diminished by her time in Auschwitz, and unable to take into account how much willpower and courage it had required just to start living again afterwards. Her marriage soured, and her husband tried to take their children away from her, claiming she was abnormal and mad. Marceline's husband, on the other hand, is a 'go-getter' who believes one should not be obsessed by the past, or imprisoned by bad memories. He cannot understand, and nor can the doctors she sees, her anxiety attacks which sometimes last for days.

The story which particularly impacted my own thinking about the disordered psychic legacy of survival, though, is that of her former comrade Marie-Louise, whom Delbo visits in her home. Marie-Louise married Pierre, her former employer, and had a daughter, before her deportation, and returned to them after her liberation. On the surface she is happy and comfortably domesticated - she confesses, tellingly, that she never moves far from her home. She spends much of her time reading and writing about deportation, out of the need to remember, and 'for enjoyment'(though she says there aren't many books about Auschwitz) and also for Pierre, who likes to read whatever she writes. So far, so seemingly atypical of the survivor's post-traumatic life, but Delbo has seen through the artificiality of Marie-Louise's portrayal. 'She spoke', notes Delbo, 'in a low, soft voice, in perfect harmony with the soft hues of her draperies, the pale color of her dress, the gentle light streaming through the shirred tulle of her curtains, and, beyond, the leafy boughs of a tree covering the window.'

(ibid. :280). The story Marie-Louise tells is one of recovery from the suffering she endured following her return, from the post-traumatic stress, tiredness, weakness, trembling and sweating in the presence of other people, and fear even of her own daughter, who was thirteen when she came back from Auschwitz, and seemed at first to be unable to talk to her, and to be scared of her. She credits Pierre with having 'put me back in this life without me even noticing it'. They are happy together, she says, never bored and spend the evenings together talking. And then: 'We never stop talking about Auschwitz. My memories have become his own. So much so I have the distinct impression he was there with me' (ibid. :281).

Pierre arrives home at this point, and the couple talk to Charlotte frankly and openly- almost light-heartedly- about how he gradually helped her back to physical and mental health. Clearly, though, he has no real conception of what she went through in Auschwitz. His memory for the detail he has assimilated concerning Marie-Louise's time in the camp, and names and personal histories of their former comrades is remarkable- better than that of Marie-Louise, from whom he has obviously learned it, or Charlotte. He talks of the return visit Marie-Louise and he made to Birkenau, a few years earlier, as if of a return to some former home, and of horrific incidents like the selection run, or the carrying of soil for the new garden, in the manner one might recount memories of one's travels, though he is clearly aware of their context. He is even pleased that they were able to see more of the camp than Marie- Louise had known during her time there, including the gas chambers and crematoria! He tells Charlotte that he attends all the reunions of former comrades with Marie-Louise, and talks of them as if they were reunions of old schoolmates. The conversation then returns to the present, and Charlotte, who has been invited to stay the night, eventually makes her excuses and leaves. She promises to return, but it is clearly a promise she does not intend to keep.

Delbo leaves it to the reader to interpret the relationship between Marie-Louise and Pierre, but it seems to me that it is one which, more than any of her other stories of survival, illustrates the unbridgeable epistemological and existential chasm between survivors and those to whom they return. There are no evident behavioural issues on Marie-Louise's side, or indifference to her psychic condition on Pierre's side, which might ultimately threaten their relationship, as it has in the case of other survivors mentioned above. In some ways, however, their relationship nevertheless feels toxic, and slightly sinister, though Marie-Louise insists,

and Pierre seems to feel, that he is a model husband. Has Pierre colonised and sanitized Marie-Louise's common memory of Auschwitz out of his feelings for her, so as to ameliorate her day to day life as a survivor, and thus protect her, or is it an attempt to psychologically and emotionally neuter her experience in his own interest of preserving their comfortable if inauthentic, present life together? Or is he simply unaware of what he has done - an insensitive fool who seems to know everything but understands nothing? Is his absurd banalisation of Marie-Louise's experience of Auschwitz something which he has conceived for her benefit, as some form of perceived therapy, or for his own benefit, to assuage his guilt as someone who survived the war in evident comfort and safety, while she suffered intolerably? Is it, on the other hand, Marie-Louise who is the real architect of this fantasy life together? Has she manipulated Pierre by feeding him every detail concerning her time in Auschwitz, and its aftermath, knowing that he would want to assimilate it and take on the role of her psychological and emotional spokesperson, and thus shield her from the attention of others and give her the seclusion she seeks? Has Pierre remade her, or has she remade herself, and him? And what of her deep memory, which neither Pierre nor anyone other than herself, can access? Was the real purpose of this charade of an existence to repress it? If so, how far has she succeeded, and if not, how and when did her 'Auschwitz self' re-emerge? Is her deep memory if not extinguished, at least under control, or a psychic time bomb which in all probability will one day be detonated? Whatever the answers, it seems to me that this story is more than a description of a sad state of affairs; it is a warning to all the other Pierres, and Marie-Louises who might read it.

As can be seen from the passages from *Auschwitz and After* cited above, Delbo does not share Améry's aversion to describing her physical and sensory experiences for her readers; on the contrary, it is an essential part of what she has to say. On the other hand she is fully aware that her words cannot possibly convey the sensory reality of what she felt in Auschwitz to those who have never felt such experiences in their own lives. In fact one of her untitled prose poems is dedicated to precisely that subject (ibid. :275-278). We cannot answer the questions you ask about hunger fear and death in terms of your words, she tells her readers, and if we answer you in our words, you will not understand what we say, and thus whatever 'knowledge' those words seem to convey will be useless knowledge. Survivors would be better advised, she says, simply to get on with the business of living.

Delbo's writing is dominated by three themes; the need to try to make people see the experience of Auschwitz as the horrific experience it really was, the need to illuminate the seemingly unbridgeable existential gulf between survivors and those to whom they return, and the need to make others understand that, as Jennifer Geddes puts it, 'the knowledge one acquires from extreme suffering is not useful for life' (Geddes, 2003; 111). It is both a warning to survivors about the dangers of 'speaking with death', if they wish to go on living, and also to their listeners or readers, about the futility of instrumentalizing the testimony of survivors - as a message of redemption, or triumph of the human spirit, for example. It is telling us that, as Geddes notes: 'The knowledge gained from suffering is part of the suffering itself, not a good that can be extracted from it'(Ibid. :112). Delbo's testimony, as revealed in the three works which comprise *Auschwitz and After*, says Geddes, thus 'offers a phenomenology of suffering that questions the outsider's ability to know or comprehend that suffering' (ibid. :110). And that of course, as Delbo must have been aware, represents an acutely difficult balancing act – how can one both insist on the inaccessibility of the reality or truth of one's experience, and yet retain the reader's intellectual and moral interest in one's story?

9.3 Primo Levi: The Reasonable Man in Extremis

Primo Levi is perhaps the world's best known author of Holocaust related testimony. The two books of his on which I mainly focus, *If This is a Man*, and *The Drowned and the Saved*, are very different, the former being an anecdotal account of Levi's experience of Auschwitz, written in the aftermath of his liberation and return home, and the latter a collection of essays on Holocaust-related subjects written forty years later. Levi started to write *If This is a Man* in February 1946, four months after returning to his family home in Turin following his liberation and circuitous journey back to Italy (the story of which he recounts in his book *The Truce*, first published in 1963), and finished it at the end of that year. It was published in October 1947[50] Only 1,500 copies of the book were sold, but in 1958 it was republished by the leading Italian publisher Einaudi, and sold over 500,000 copies in Italy, before being

[50] For a detailed account of the process see Thomson, 2003. Thomson notes that although Levi 'constructed a sort of legend' that the book had been written 'in furious haste', on his return, it was in fact begun 16 weeks after his return and written over a period of 10 months, working in the evenings after he had finished work at the DUCO paint factory, where he was employed.

published in translation in numerous languages, including English and German, as well as being adapted for radio, theatre, and other media. Not only was Levi one of only three Italians to have survived from among those in the convoy in which he was deported from Fossoli, but he was able to return to his family and his home. He married, in September 1947, but he and his wife Lucia continued to live in the family flat with Levi's mother. In 1948 Levi resumed his career as a chemist.

Considering its subject, *If this is a Man* is a very readable and accessible account, which provides a considerable amount of factual information, as well as a measured, frank, and insightful portrayal of the experience of being a prisoner in the Auschwitz satellite work camp of Monowitz-Buna. Writing it, from the account of his biographer, Ian Thomson, seems to have been a cathartic process for Levi. *The Drowned and the Saved,* on the other hand, in keeping with its essayistic form, is a more reflective, but also impassioned work, which to my mind has some definite and possibly conscious echoes of Améry's essays. It is notable also for its inclusion of an essay on Améry himself, which ostensibly concerns the latter's essay *At the Mind's Limits*, about the experience of an intellectual in Auschwitz, but in fact represents a much broader posthumous philosophical 'argument' with Améry, and with himself, which I examine later in this Chapter. *The Drowned and the Saved* was published in 1986, shortly before Levi committed suicide in April 1987, at the family home in which he had continued to reside ever since his return. Unlike Améry, who carefully planned his suicide, Levi's suicide appears to have been impulsive and, since no suicide note was found, has provoked considerable subsequent speculation regarding Levi's motivation for killing himself in such a sudden and violent manner (allegedly by throwing himself down the stairwell outside his third floor flat).

The underlying theme of *If this is a Man* is Levi's struggle to survive physically and psychologically in Auschwitz, whilst retaining some vestige of humanity, in the face of a system which was specifically purposed to degrade and dehumanize, and ultimately destroy its victims. The need to engage in that struggle is made clear to Levi on the morning after his arrival at Monowitz, when he surveys the appearance of his fellow prisoners, already transformed by their shaved heads and prison uniforms:

> It is not possible to sink lower than this; no human condition is more miserable than this, nor could it conceivably be so. Nothing belongs to us any more; they have taken away our clothes, our shoes, even our hair; if we speak, they will not listen to us, and if they listen they will not understand. They will even take away our name: and if we want to keep it, we will have to find ourselves the strength to do so, to manage somehow so that behind the name something of us, of us as we were, still remains (Levi, 1987; 32-3).

One way to achieve this goal, Levi finds, is through his friendship with another Italian prisoner, Alberto. He also gets strength from the signs of residual humanity he finds in other prisoners, such as Resnyk, a young Pole with whom he shares a bunk. Resnyk volunteers to make up their sleeping place for the morning inspection, which is a difficult and dangerous operation, because in the mad régime of the Lager (Camp), being deemed to have made it up wrongly incurs brutal punishment. Resnyk also accepts Levi as his workmate, carrying heavy railway sleepers, despite the fact that Levi is weaker than him, which means that Resnyk will end up bearing a greater part of the sleeper's weight. The most important material key to physical survival, on the other hand is to obtain extra food over and above the meagre daily ration of soup and bread, and this means for Levi and Alberto, as for others desperate enough to take the risk of being caught, stealing whatever goods they can from the Germans which can be bartered for food on the camp's illicit 'Exchange Market', run mainly by the Greek Jews of Salonika.

Levi, though not callous or insensitive by nature, is nevertheless driven by necessity to become ruthlessly rational and pragmatic when it comes to surviving. He learns that in the Lager there must be no respite in the struggle for survival 'because everyone is ferociously and desperately alone'. It is a pitiless process of natural selection, in which the strong, the adaptable and the astute are to be befriended, and those who are weak of body or mind, like the *Müsselmanner* shunned and left to die. Thomson observes that 'Levi hated these husks of men: association with them was dangerous because they carried disease and their nihilism was contagious' (Thomson, 2003: 174). Thomson also notes that the general condition of all the Jewish prisoners appeared pitiful, even to the other inmates of the Auschwitz IV labour

camp, such as one of the British military POWs, Alfred Battams[51], who passed the *Judenlager* daily on his way back from work:

> They didn't look human. It was unbelievable, some of them had these rags on their feet, where their clogs'd worn through---walking skeletons. I saw kiddies only so high being horsewhipped by the SS. They had these long bull- whips, and they lashed at the children, and they had these Alsatian dogs. I don't want to talk about it[crying]. It was unbelievable that people could've sunk so low (ibid).

Levi is apparently not only assiduous in his efforts to survive, but also lucky, because as a chemist he is eventually deemed to have special skills relevant to the work of Buna as a rubber production plant (though in the event no rubber will ever be actually produced there). He is transferred to Kommando 98- the 'Chemical Kommando'- with his friend Alberto, and, having passed an 'examination' in chemistry in the form of an interrogation by the humourless Dr Pannwitz can once again see himself, however briefly, as a person: Primo Levi, B.Sc., of Turin. Despite his newly acquired status, though, he remains a Jewish prisoner, and thus on the lowest rung of the hierarchy of prisoners- the slave of slaves – for whom survival was a battle without respite. One needed 'to resist enemies, to have no pity for rivals, to sharpen one's wits, build up one's patience, strengthen one's will power'. Only those few 'made of the stuff of martyrs and saints', Levi declared, could survive without renouncing some part of their moral world (Levi,1989: 98). Levi is neither; when he surprisingly survives 'the great selection' for the gas chamber, for example, he and Alberto decide that it may have been due to his identity being confused with that of the much younger man next to him who is bizarrely selected when he clearly should not have been, but they say nothing.

Levi's luck also continues to hold. When the allied bombardment of the Works begins to threaten the prisoners' vital food supplies, he becomes the object of a gratuitous act of kindness by an Italian civilian worker, Lorenzo, who for several months gives him part of his bread ration, and an old vest to wear, as well as writing a postcard on his behalf to his family in Italy, and bringing a reply, without seeking or accepting any reward. It was due to Lorenzo, he says, that he continued to stay alive, not because of his material help so much as reminding

[51] Thomson records that the camp's inmates included about 30,000 foreign non -Jews, including 3-4,000 British POWs, in addition to 10-12,000 Jews.

him that there existed a just world outside the camp for which it was worth surviving, and also that he remained a human being in the eyes of others. Subsequently, as Levi and the other prisoners are fearfully awaiting the onset of winter, which they calculate will bring death to seven out of every ten of them, Levi is chosen, from among the members of the Chemical Kommando, to be a 'specialized worker', in the camp laboratory with the right to a new shirt and pair of underpants, and a weekly shave, but more importantly to work in a place in which the temperature is maintained at 65 degrees Fahrenheit, rather than labouring in the bitter cold.

Levi, though, despite his good fortune, still experiences the shame and humiliation of a Jewish prisoner. He recalls one particularly shameful incident, when one of the survivors of the October 1944 *Sonderkommando* uprising is publicly hanged before the assembled inmates of the camp. Before he dies, the man cries out; 'Comrades, I am the last one!', but rather than responding with some defiant word or gesture, Levi and the other prisoners remain standing in silence with lowered heads, out of fear of reprisal: 'slaves, worn out, worthy of the unarmed death which awaited us' (ibid. :156). He and Alberto later confess to each other to feeling 'oppressed by shame'.

Levi's final stroke of 'luck' was to be taken seriously ill with scarlet fever in January 1945. and as a result he was in the Lager hospital when the Russian army began closing in on Buna. The SS abandoned the camp , and 20,000 prisoners, including Alberto, were forced to set out on one of the notorious death marches westwards, but Levi and the other 800 patients in camp hospital were left behind. As a result, Levi and the other surviving patients were liberated by the Russians, whilst Alberto is never seen again and probably died from exhaustion, as did most other prisoners, during the march.

In the Afterword to the edition of *If This is a Man* first published together with *The Truce*, in 1979 (the edition referenced herein), Levi records his 'Answers to his Readers' Questions' - those most frequently asked by readers of *If This is a Man*- which serves as a valuable perspectival bridge between that book and *The Drowned and the Saved.*

In answer to the question: 'Did Germans know what was happening?', Levi replies that Germans generally knew of the existence of the camps, though very little of what was

happening specifically to the Jews in them. All Germans however, he declared, knew about the 'multiform anti-Semitic barbarity' of the persecution of the Jews: 'Millions of them had been present- with indifference or with curiosity, with contempt or with downright malign joy- at the burning of synagogues, or humiliation of Jews and Jewesses forced to kneel in the street mud' (ibid.:385). Many would have also learned something about the camps from listening to foreign radio broadcasts, or seeing lines of Jewish deportees in the streets or at railway stations. Some would have learned much more as civilian workers in or around the concentration camps. So if any Germans didn't know about the camps, it was probably because they didn't want to know - indeed they wanted *not* to know - and for this, he says, he holds the German people 'fully culpable'.

In answer to the question why 'there are no expressions of hate for Germans, no desire for revenge [in *If This is a Man* and *The Truce*]. Have you forgiven them?', Levi states that he is not temperamentally inclined to hatred or a desire for revenge, but also consciously repressed such feelings of hatred or violence as he harboured towards his Auschwitz persecutors. In his writing, he added, he 'deliberately assumed the calm, sober language of the witness, neither the lamenting tones of the victim nor the irate voice of someone who seeks revenge' (ibid.: 382)to ensure that his testimony would be accepted as credible. He saw his role as a witness whose task was 'prepare the ground for the judge'(ibid.). As for forgiveness, he added, he would not forgive anyone unless that person can be shown to have become conscious of past errors, condemned them, and 'uprooted them from his conscience' (ibid). This seems a curiously ambivalent answer, given that Levi had previously reacted angrily in 1967 to a remark made by Améry that 'Unlike Levi, I am not a man to forgive' (Heidelberger-Leonard, 2010: 66).

In response to the question 'How can the Nazis' fanatical hatred of the Jews be explained?', Levi warns that 'Perhaps one cannot, what is more one must not, understand what happened, because to understand is almost to justify'(ibid.: 395). No normal human being, he continues, can or should want to identify with Hitler or the other Nazi leaders, or to seek to explain a phenomenon so devoid of rationality as Auschwitz. Nazi hatred of Jews, he concludes, 'is not in us; it is outside man, it is a poison fruit sprung from the deadly trunk of Fascism, but it is outside and beyond Fascism itself' (ibid. :395-6). There are distinct echoes in this description of Améry's Preface to the Reissue of *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne* written in 1977. There

was really nothing, Améry had said, which provides enlightenment on the eruption of 'radical Evil' in Germany: 'It issued so to speak, through spontaneous generation, from a womb that bore it as a perversion' (Améry, 1999: viii). Levi adds, though, that whilst we cannot understand this hatred, we can and must understand from where it springs, since 'what happened could happen again'. We must understand in particular the power of charismatic leaders like Hitler to transform their own madness into collective madness, and that they only become truly dangerous when ordinary people are swept up in that madness, and become unquestioning functionaries, or blindly faithful followers. There is no simple formula for resisting charismatic leaders, he concluded, but the memory of what happened in the past might at least serve to support those who wish to find the strength to resist.

If, as Levi declared, his intention in writing *If This is a Man* was to play the role of a witness, and leave others to play the role of judge, it is clear that when, forty years later, he wrote the essays which comprise *The Drowned and the Saved,* he was both better equipped and far more willing to assume the role of judge. This realignment in his position had in fact been signalled much earlier, in a letter sent by Levi in May 1960 to Heinz Riedt, who had just finished translating *If This is a Man* into German - a letter which Levi and his German publishers decided would become the Preface of the German edition of the book. In that letter, Levi thanked Riedt for enabling him to 'speak to the German people and to remind them of what they had done, and say to them: "I am alive, and I would like to understand you in order to judge you"' (Thomson, 2003:290-1). He did not, he said, or at least did not any longer, hate the German people, but could not pretend to understand them, and hoped that their response to his book might help him to understand them a little better. More than twenty years later, in his Preface *to The Drowned and the Saved* Levi offers a distinctly more direct challenge to his readers. He reminds them how many people had been involved in organisations dealing directly with the Nazi apparatus - major industrial enterprises, like I. G. Farben, which operated the Buna works, and other users of slave labour, but also those indirectly involved, such as suppliers of cloth for prison uniforms, or Zyklon B poison in unprecedentedly large quantities, who must have known, or at least been able to accurately surmise, something, and often a great deal, about the atrocities being committed in the camps, but 'chose the more prudent path of keeping their eyes and ears (and above all their mouths) well shut' (Levi, 1989: 4). He points out the continuing indifference of many such

industrial concerns to their past actions, noting that Topf of Wiesbaden, which designed and built the Auschwitz crematoria , was still in operation *under its old name* in 1975. The general cowardice of Germans in the face of Nazi terror, he declares, was one of the major collective crimes of the German people.

The Drowned and the Saved, declared Levi in his Preface, had been written in order to clarify 'some aspects of the Lager phenomenon which still appear obscure', but also, more ambitiously, to answer 'the most urgent question': 'How much of the concentration camp world is dead and will not return? How much is back, or is coming back? What can each of us do, so that in this world pregnant with threats, at least this threat will be nullified?' (ibid: 9). In tackling these questions he does not shrink from describing the true horror of the victim experience, nor, on the other hand, does he sanctify the victims. He acknowledges that solidarity among prisoners was the exception rather than the rule in the camps, and indeed that sowing the seeds of division and hostility between different categories of prisoners was an objective largely successfully pursued by the SS. Prisoners granted privileged status, he said, were incited to exercise their power to 'tame' other prisoners, and especially new arrivals who might still retain some semblance of resistance or human dignity, through verbal and physical aggression, including beatings which sometimes resulted in death. On the other hand, Levi acknowledges the courage of some privileged prisoners in seeking out SS officers to corrupt and bribe, or towards the War's end, frighten with the prospect of reprisal, into reversing some of their crueller decisions, and the exceptional contribution of those political prisoners who became members of secret resistance groups, as in the case of Herman Langbein in Auschwitz. Levi also acknowledges exceptional cases of collective resistance by groups of prisoners which demonstrated the capacity both for solidarity, and for making courageous, though ultimately fatal, moral choices in the camps. He cites in particular the Auschwitz *Sonderkommando* uprising in October 1944, all the participants in which were killed, and the refusal of 400 Corfu Jews, in July 1944, to work as *Sonderkommandos* in Auschwitz, as a consequence of which they were immediately gassed (ibid: 41-2).

In another chapter of the book, Levi addresses of the question of shame or guilt in relation both to imprisonment in and survival of the camps. It is clear from his account that this is really a different question from that raised in relation to rape or torture in the preceding

chapter of this dissertation, in which the victim's sense of shame, humiliation, or guilt was focused on the experience of the specific act of bodily violation and the victim's defencelessness on the face of it. The experience of Auschwitz, by contrast, is that of daily suffering over a prolonged period of time involving innumerable acts of physical and psychological brutality, degradation and inhumanity against prisoners, but also some shameful acts by prisoners themselves, born out of their desperation to survive. Feelings of shame or guilt might therefore be experienced by prisoners in Auschwitz during their imprisonment as a result of particular incidents, such as Levi's witnessing of the hanging of the *Sonderkommando* uprising 'last man', but also, as Levi points out, as a more general sense of shame at having been reduced to existing on an animal level - for example having been driven by hunger to steal food destined for others. Nevertheless, he notes, incidences of prisoners committing suicide were relatively uncommon in the Lager; less common, in fact than amongst survivors. This, he suggests is partly because of the lack of opportunity in the Lager, or prisoners being 'too busy dying' to think about killing themselves, but also because prisoners either did not actually experience feelings of guilt, or felt that 'one was in effect expiating it by one's daily suffering' (ibid. :51). For some, as Delbo also noted in her case and that of her comrades, survival also became to be seen an act of resistance to one's intended fate, though equally suicide could be seen by other prisoners as the ultimate act of self-determination, and thus of resistance. For survivors, on the other hand, feeling of shame or guilt, Levi suggested, were more common, particularly where acts not arousing a sense of shame or guilt at the time of their commital were sometimes later judged by them in hindsight through the prism of a 'civilian moral code', as having been shameful. Some survivors, said Levi, became no longer able to live with the shame or guilt invoked by the memory of such acts, and took their own lives, whilst others had looked to testimony as a means of expiating their shame or guilt, though he could not say to what extent they did so out of a sense of moral obligation to those who did not survive, or simply to 'free ourselves of the memory'. Psychologists he adds are 'not competent' to explain the impulse to testify (ibid. :64). The reader is left to ponder into which of these categories, if any, Levi might have placed himself, though it is of course tempting to read his comments in the light of his own subsequent suicide.

The shame of the world, though, declares Levi, should always be seen as a vaster shame than that of survivors. Shame such as that of those Germans under the Third Reich, who, faced with their own crimes and those of others, turned their backs so as not to see or feel touched by it, 'deluding themselves that not seeing was a way of not knowing, and that not knowing relieved them of their share of complicity or connivance' (ibid. :65).

In the chapter of *The Drowned and the Saved* entitled 'Useless Violence', Levi touches on the relationship between acts of seemingly useless cruelty by Nazi perpetrators, and the nature of National Socialism which, once again echoes a theme of Améry's earlier essays - in this case his essay on torture. The 'Hitlerian years', Levi argues, were characterised by widespread 'useless violence' - violence 'as an end in itself, with the sole purpose of creating pain, occasionally having a purpose, yet always redundant, always disproportionate to the purpose itself.' (ibid. :83). Deportees, for example, were transported to the concentration camps in sealed and deliberately tightly packed cattle wagons - far more tightly packed in the case of Jews transported from Eastern Europe than Western Europe - which *intentionally* lacked straw, sanitary facilities, food and water, even for journeys of up to two weeks. Levi recalls an incident when deportees in his own convoy to Auschwitz were forced to descend from their wagons at a railroad station in Austria, where they were compelled out of necessity to relieve themselves in the open, in full view of others in the station, who naturally regarded them as behaving like animals rather than human beings. Useless cruelty, and especially that designed to violate individual modesty and dignity, also conditioned the existence of all Lagers, Levi notes - the women of Birkenau, for example, tell how their soup bowls also had to be used for evacuating themselves at night, and washing themselves. Similarly, prisoners in the camps were constantly being forced to strip naked, ostensibly for showers or medical examinations, or even more cruelly for selections. Roll calls lasting typically one to three hours but on occasion up to twenty-four hours, usually after an escape, were another form of useless cruelty, especially in the winter rain and snow, often leading to individuals breaking down or dying. Useless cruelty was equally evident in the enforcement of absurd camp rules, such as the need for prisoners to show at all times five buttons on their filthy and lice- infested jackets, or the absurdly strict bedmaking rules. And of course it was useless cruelty which primarily motivated the use of prisoners as 'beasts of burden', carrying or pulling heavy loads, or digging useless holes, such as the women of Ravensbrück being made to shovel sand in

sand dunes; activities which had no purpose other than to break the will, and ultimately the body, of the prisoner. It was the ' Nazi logic', said Levi, that ' the "enemy" should not only die, but die in torment' (ibid. :96). Violence, said Levi, 'ran in the veins' of the SS guards; most of them were not psychopaths nor sadists, but had simply been saturated by indoctrination with the 'morality' of the totalitarian Nazi regime, and given unlimited powers to exercise their violent natures. When the former commandant of Treblinka, Franz Stangl, was interviewed the writer Gitta Sereny, Levi recalled, she asked him what the point was of the cruelties and humiliations inflicted on prisoners, considering they were to be killed anyway. He replied that it was 'To condition those who were to be the material executors of the operations. To make it possible for them to do what they were doing' (ibid. :100-101). As Améry said, the logic of depravity. It brought to mind a passage from a speech Imre Kertesz made to the Academy of Arts in Berlin in 2007. Kertesz noted that Eichmann's remark, during his trial, that he was never an anti-Semite was not absurd (though it was false), since the murder of millions of Jews required 'good organizers' rather than anti-Semites[52]

In another chapter of his book, Levi addresses the question he says he is invariably asked by audiences he addresses, namely why the prisoners in Auschwitz and other camps did not try more often to escape, or rebel against their captors - a question which, he said, had become formulated with increasing persistence over the years, and with 'an ever less hidden accent of accusation' (ibid. :122). It is perhaps this chapter which most directly addresses the existential and moral chasm between survivors and the world, because, as Levi says, it is raised by those who live in a free society, to whom escape from an illegitimate and abnormal imprisonment appears both possible and something of a moral obligation, to expiate the shame of capture and imprisonment. It is, he adds, a notion constantly reinforced by popular literature and other media, for example concerning the exploits of Allied prisoners of war in German camps, but one which bears little resemblance to the situation of Jews, gypsies, or Soviet prisoners in a concentration camp in Poland or Germany. For them, not only was escape an almost impossibly difficult and dangerous physical challenge, and one which could lead to terrible reprisals against those who remained, but also futile, since the local population outside the camp was hostile to them, and thus more likely to give them up to the

[52] A speech made on 19th June 2007 entitled 'Europe's Oppressive Legacy' at a conference entitled 'Perspective Europe' accessed on 21st April, 2011 on the website http://www.sightandsound.com/features/1382.html.

Germans, or kill them, than shelter them. Moreover, in the very rare cases where escapes were successful, and escapees were subsequently able to tell those to whom they returned the truth about the camps, they were almost never listened to or believed. Nevertheless, Levi notes, the popular myth of revolt and uprising by the oppressed majority against the powerful few is a story as old as humanity, although the historical truth is that the minority of such actions which succeed are not typically led by the radically oppressed, or those whose physical and moral strength has been depleted to the point of exhaustion.

The final chapter of *The Drowned and the Saved* concerns the reception of the German edition *of If This Is a Man*, as revealed in correspondence received by Levi from some of its German readers. He had pictured the German edition at the time of its publication[53], he said, as being like a loaded gun pointed at German heads, especially given that, in 1961, most of its readers were likely to be members of the war generation:

> Before they were oppressors or indifferent spectators, now they would be readers: I would corner them, tie them before a mirror. The hour had come to settle accounts, to put the cards on the table. Above all the hour of conversation. I was not interested in revenge-----My task was to understand them. Not that handful of high-ranking culprits, but them, the people I had seen from close up, those from among whom the SS militia were recruited, and also those others who had believed, who not believing kept silent, who did not have the frail courage to look into our eyes, throw us a piece of bread, whisper a human word (ibid. :138)

Levi 's hope, he said, was that the book would 'have some echo' in Germany, and that the nature of that echo would enable him to understand the Germans people better. In fact , however, he received only about forty letters from German readers he considered worthy of attention between 1961 and 1964, (about one letter for every thousand people who had bought the book), almost all of which were written by people who either said they were, or appeared to be young, and thus not members of the war generation.

[53]The German version was published in early 1961 with an initial print run of 50,000 copies, of which 20,000 sold immediately (Thomson, 2003: 292-3).

Dr. T.H. of Hamburg, who wrote to Levi in 1962, though, was clearly a member of the war generation, and offered a range of excuses for the conduct of Germans during the Nazi period. Hitler, he said, had in 1933 seemed the lesser evil than Communism, and the people had been taken in by his 'beautiful words', lied to and betrayed by him. Moreover, he declared, Hitler's hatred for the Jews was 'never popular' - on the contrary Germany 'deservedly counted as the country most friendly to the Jews in the entire world'. He had personally never heard of any case of spontaneous outrage or aggression against Jews - 'only (very dangerous) attempts to help them'. Also, it had been impossible for people to rebel against the totalitarian state, and those who tried in July 1944 had been executed 'in thousands and thousands'. 'Dear Dr Levi', Dr. T.H. concluded, 'I have no excuses. I have no explanations. The guilt weighs heavily on my poor betrayed and misguided people'. (ibid. :145-6). Levi's response, he said, was 'perhaps the only irate [letter] I ever wrote'. Dr. T.H., he opined, was a typical specimen of the German upper-middle class: 'a not fanatical but opportunistic Nazi who repented when it was opportune to repent, stupid enough to believe that he can make me believe his simplified version of recent history'. (ibid. ;147). Levi responded. that 'no Church offers indulgencies to those who follow the Devil or accepts as justification the attribution of one's sins to the Devil.' He reminded him that in the last freely held elections to the Reichstag, in November 1932, whilst it was true Hitler's 'beautiful words' had secured 196 seats for the Nazis, the Communists had won 100 seats, and the Social Democrats 120 seats. He pointed out that Hitler had not betrayed the German people - he was a 'coherent fanatic' who had made his ideas crystal clear years previously in his book *Mein Kampf*, including his portrayal of Jews as the eternal enemy, and never thereafter changed or concealed them, and also revealed in that book his plan to conquer and dominate other countries. Anti-Semitism had been the foundation of Nazi policy, reiterated by Hitler 'to the point of obsession', so no one who voted for him could have been 'friendly' towards the Jews. As for resistance, it had been too little, too late. Finally, nothing had obliged German industrialists to use Jews as slave labour, or the Topf company to design and build crematoria, save the desire for profit, or obliged Germans to join the SS, or take clothes or shoes from dead Jews, *including children*, for their own use (ibid. :147-8).

Other letters Levi received, he said, were very different in seeming to demonstrate their authors had read Levi's book attentively, and to have loved and understood it, but they could

not be considered a representative sample of the views of the tens of thousands who read the German edition of his book. In fact, one of these 'good' readers, the student H.L., tells him that that although all her teachers were put through a 'De-Nazification' programme, it was conducted in 'an amateurish, dilettantesque manner, and widely sabotaged'. She also tells him that young people are resistant to the idea of German collective guilt, and many state they have had enough of the *mea culpa* of the press, and their teachers.

Hety Schmitt-Maas- 'Hety S'- who worked for the Ministry of Culture of the Land Hessen, seems to have been the only member of the war generation with whom Levi maintained a lengthy correspondence, and developed a 'long and fruitful, often cheerful' friendship between October 1966 and November 1982 (she died in 1983). Her vocation, said Levi, was to put 'men with a destiny' in touch with each other, in return for being given copies of the letters they exchanged, and it is she who puts Levi in touch with Jean Améry. She was also, Levi notes, the only one of his war generation correspondents with 'clean credentials'- a Social Democrat who had refused as a girl to join the Hitler Youth and whose father had been briefly imprisoned in Dachau as an opponent of the Nazi regime.

Levi's Conclusion to *The Drowned and the Saved* is as bleak, in its way, as Améry's Preface to the Reissue of *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne*. He writes that the experiences of survivors of the Nazi Lagers 'are extraneous to the new Western generation, and become ever more extraneous as the years pass' (ibid.:166). Nevertheless, he argues, the voices of survivors must be listened to because what happened was neither foreseen nor predicted, and, incredibly, had happened 'to an entire civilized people' who had 'followed a buffoon whose figure today inspires laughter, and yet Adolf Hitler was obeyed and his praises were sung right up to the catastrophe'(ibid.: 167). 'It happened', he says, 'therefore it can happen again: this is the core of what we have to say'. (ibid.: 166-7). The SS who served in them were directly responsible for what happened in the camps but they had not been, save for exceptions, 'mind twisted individuals, ill-born, sadists, afflicted by an original flaw' but average human beings who had been 'reared badly'. Others among those responsible for the Holocaust and other atrocities had been a mixture of 'diligent followers and functionaries', some of whom were fanatical Nazis, but many others of whom were just indifferent to the consequences of their actions, fearful of punishment for disobeying, ambitious careerists, or just naturally 'too obedient'. But behind them stood the great majority of the German people:

> who accepted in the beginning, out of mental laziness, myopic calculation, stupidity, and national pride, the 'beautiful words' of Corporal Hitler, followed him as long as luck and the lack of scruples favoured him, were swept away by his ruin, afflicted by deaths, misery and remorse, and rehabilitated a few years later as a result of an unprincipled political game. (ibid. :170).

Levi's verdict is in essence very similar to that of Améry in his 1964-6 essays, though Améry had issued his message from inside the lion's den, when any general responsibility for the past was still being hotly denied, or at best shrugged off, and, as Sebald pointed out, he had done so in the face of direct hostility. *The Drowned and the Saved* is certainly, as Ian Thomson notes, 'a more argumentative, tortured and sceptical book' than *If This is a Man,* but the difference is, as Thomson points out, not difficult to understand. The latter book was written by a twenty-eight year old who had recently completed a journey from 'pain to consolation', and emerged on the winning side, whilst the former was written by a man in his mid-sixties, who had been living with Auschwitz for forty-two years, and had seen much evidence in that time of man's continuing brutality to man (Thomson, 2003: 504-5). Levi, like Améry before him, had been defeated by the forces of history, and the politics of the present, but in truth, unlike Améry, he had not tried very hard to oppose them when it really mattered. In essence, as I explain in more detail below, in relation to Levi's 'posthumous argument' with Améry I see *The Drowned and the Saved* as at least in part an argument between Levi and himself, and largely as one concerning the ethics of survival, to which some believe his suicide was the outcome. I turn next to the very different story of Ruth Kluger's experience as a Holocaust victim and survivor.

9.4 Ruth Kluger's Holocaust Childhood

Ruth Kluger was born in Vienna, in 1931, to Jewish parents, and lived in that city until 1942. In her memoir *Landscapes of Memory* (first published under the title *Still Alive*, in 2001), she tells how, following the German occupation of Austria in March 1938, Vienna became her 'first prison'. Her father, a gynaecologist and paediatrician, was arrested in 1940 by the SS for performing an illegal abortion and interned, and on his release was compelled to leave Austria for Italy, leaving Ruth and her mother trapped in Vienna. Her father was eventually arrested in France, in 1944, and deported from Drancy to Auschwitz, where he was presumed

to have been gassed shortly after his arrival. Ruth, her mother and grandmother were among the last Jews to be deported from Vienna to Theresienstadt, in September 1942. The Nazis, she said, called Theresienstadt a ghetto, but in reality it was a prison, and was extremely overcrowded, housing 40-50,000 people in a barracks designed for 3,500 soldiers and civilians at most. Though she felt safe there, in the sense of her life not being threatened by others, Theresienstadt was a 'hotbed of epidemics', her grandmother being one of those who died there.

In May 1944, Ruth and her mother were deported to Auschwitz in a cattle truck. Her strongest recollection of the journey is of the overcrowding, and of the air inside the truck which smelled of sweat, urine, excrement and 'a whiff of panic', and her own sense of being abandoned. Her reaction on arrival at Auschwitz was one of terror, but 'I knew immediately that this was no place for crying, that the last thing I needed to do was to attract attention' (Kluger, 2004: 108). Considering, she said, that for virtually the whole of her existence as a conscious person, her human rights had been taken away from her piece by piece, it seemed to her that Auschwitz, where prisoners were hated and disrespected to the point of denying their very existence as human beings, had 'a kind of logic to it'. Ruth and her mother were put into the 'Theresienstadt Family Camp' in Birkenau, which was exceptional in that it housed men, women, children and even babies. Her mother immediately suggested that she and Ruth both run to the camp's electrified fence together, to kill themselves, but Ruth refused, and her mother (who went on to live to the age of 97) accepted her refusal, though Kluger believes her suggestion had been serious, and one she too might have made in her place. Life for her in Auschwitz, she said, was about nothing more than roll calls, thirst, and the fear of dying. Kluger has little time for those who talk of having experienced signs of life or hope in Auschwitz, or for the pronouncements of psychologists like Bruno Bettelheim, who claimed that a person who was not 'spoiled by a disabling bourgeois education' should be able to adjust to new social conditions , even in a concentration camp. She is equally dismissive of Bettelheim's claim that the saner the person, the better her chance of survival; on the contrary, she says, one might argue that those who suffer from compulsive disorders like paranoia would have a better chance of survival, because the reality of the Auschwitz most closely resembled their delusional world! (ibid. :121).

In June 1944 Ruth was selected with her mother for transfer to a forced labour camp called Christianstadt, a sub-camp of the Gross-Rosen concentration camp in Lower Silesia, with other women from the Theresienstadt Family Camp. The transfer saved their lives; on 7th July 1944, the Theresienstadt Family Camp was closed down and its remaining inmates all gassed. Conditions in Christianstadt, she recalls, were better than in Birkenau, and the guards, though arbitrary and partial in their treatment of prisoners, not 'egregiously cruel'. The winter of 1944-5 was very cold, though, and the women, having been assigned to do work more suitable for men, such as forest clearing or working in a quarry, or having been lent out as slave labourers to local villagers, were the least productive and cheapest part of the work force, and were thus given the smallest food rations. In February 1945 Christianstadt was closed, and Ruth and her mother escaped from a forced march to another camp, near the border of what is now Poland, and the former German Democratic Republic, and joined the procession of homeless German civilians fleeing the advancing Russian army , posing as fellow refugees, until they encountered a group of American soldiers, and were given sanctuary. Ruth's mother subsequently obtained work as an assistant and interpreter to a Jewish-American officer in the old ducal town of Straubing, in Lower Bavaria, helping with mainly young Jewish displaced persons, whilst Ruth tried to catch up on her lost years of schooling. They eventually emigrated to New York , in 1947, by which time Ruth was 16 years old.

Ruth Kluger subsequently became a Professor of German literature and taught at a number of American universities, and finally at the University of California, Irvine, and returned to Germany as director of the university's Education Abroad Program in Göttingen, aged 57. A few months later she was knocked down by a bicycle and suffered a brain haemorrhage. She recovered, but said she felt compelled by the incident to write her life story, originally in German. In 2000 she wrote a 'parallel book' (neither a translation nor a new book, she said) in English. She continued to work in Irvine and Göttingen until her retirement, and died in October 2020, aged 88.

Landscapes of Memory is a forthright, frank and unsentimental account of Kluger's life as a child victim of the Holocaust and her existence as a survivor of that experience in a largely uncomprehending and indifferent world. Her experience of victimhood benefits from the fact that it was the adolescent experience of someone whose mind was uncluttered by psychic, existential, or moral ambiguities or ambivalences, though there is no doubt that her

experiences were profoundly traumatic, and in fact resulted in her subsequently receiving (unsuccessful) psychotherapy. Her perspective on her survival has also clearly gained from her exposure to societal responses both in the United States and Germany (about both of which she is unashamedly sceptical). I will focus, though, on Part Two of her book, entitled 'The Camps'. In it one finds no sense of shame or humiliation, or loss of trust in the world (which she never had the opportunity to acquire in the first place) as a consequence of her experiences as a victim or a survivor. Certainly she experienced the same sense of disconnection from post-traumatic the world as a result of her experiences as the other survivors whose accounts appear in this dissertation, and her book bears witness to a similar epistemological, existential and moral chasm between her and the world, but she seems to have simply accepted it as a fact of life, and got on with the business of living. Of course she only spent a few weeks in Auschwitz , though in such a place even a few weeks of terror, starvation and fear of imminent death, especially as a thirteen year old girl, is surely a lifetime of suffering. However, I think the key to her resilience might be the fact that, as she said, she had experienced a continual deprivation of her rights as a human being throughout her previous conscious life, and had thus acquired no illusions about the world, or her place in it, which might be destroyed by her experience.

Kluger precedes her account of the camps, with a critique of what she calls the 'museum culture' prevalent in the presentation of former concentration camps such as Auschwitz, which, she claims, have become places where the visitor 'monitors his reactions, examines his emotions, admires his own sensibility, or in other words turns sentimental'(ibid.:71). 'For sentimentality', she continues, 'involves turning away from the ostensible object and towards the subjective observer, that is, towards oneself. It means looking into a mirror instead of reality' (ibid.). Having spent a long day at Auschwitz-Birkenau myself, I can understand her point of view- in fact from my own observations I think she may be *too* generous in assuming that all visitors react emotionally, however self-absorbedly, to what they see. Most do, I'm sure, but I also recall groups of seemingly unperturbed, if baffled, children dutifully following their guides past a selection of gruesome mementoes, on what I assume they might have regarded as a rather bizarre school outing, and others whose 'sightseeing' enthusiasm reminds me of Delbo's Marie-Louise story. Despite the stubborn sincerity and considerable presentational efforts of my guide, and my own desire to be affected by it, to weep and cry, I

confess that I found it, save for a few moments of emotion at seeing one of the preserved prisoner barracks, a largely surreal and disorienting experience. Thus, I rather agree with Kluger, who never returned to Auschwitz, that 'it is no place for pilgrimage'. 'The place which I saw, smelled and feared, and which has now been turned into a museum, has nothing to do with the woman I am', she added (ibid. :131). She did however visit another 'museum' site, Dachau:

> It was a clean and proper place, and it would have taken more imagination than your average John or Jane Doe possesses to visualize the camp as it was forty years earlier. Today a fresh wind blows across the central square where the infamous roll calls took place, and the simple barracks of stone and wood suggest a youth hostel more easily than a setting for tortured lives. Surely some visitors secretly figure they can remember times when they have been worse off than the prisoners of this orderly German camp. The missing ingredients are the odor of fear emanating from human bodies, the concentrated aggression, the reduced minds. I didn't see the ghosts of the so-called *Musselmänner* (Muslims) who dragged themselves zombielike through the long, evil hours, having lost the energy and the will to live (ibid.: 72-3).

Kluger even wonders whether the sanitized, disorienting, presentation of the past 'is the hidden purpose of these peculiar museums' though this runs counter to their proclaimed purpose. I think this applies specifically in relation to camps which are situated, like Dachau, in the territory of the perpetrators, or perhaps, like Auschwitz, those who actively collaborated with them. Perhaps the gruesome mementoes of the past one often sees on display in such places, or the dark cells, and the places of torture and death in which one stands around in awkward ignorance, reading their sombre 'information' plaques, are there to say 'this is how it was,' whilst the neatly and attractively preserved sites are there to say 'this is how it is, and how we are, now – decent, respectful people'. It would be harsh to blame those responsible, though, if that were the case.

Reading Kluger's remarks also called to mind my own visit to Oradour-sur-Glane, near Limoges, which was the site of the murder of 642 French men, women and children by soldiers of the 2nd SS-Panzer Division on 10th June 1944, and the burning down of the village. This

sudden and violent attack is now thought to have been intended as a reprisal for resistance activities which the Germans had been wrongly informed had occurred there. The village, which is now a memorial site, has been left more or less untouched as a monument to the massacre- one can still see in the ruins of burned-out houses, and charred remains of some personal effects of their owners, such as vehicles, bicycles, and sewing machines. It is, just by its presence, an intentionally authentic, unequivocal, and very affecting monument to the brutal, murderous, criminality of the perpetrators, and the martyrdom of the victims, which appears to require no further explanation. Thinking about why it had seemed right and proper to those responsible for the site to present it in this way, in contrast to those responsible for Dachau - why it should seem appropriate to make the massacre of Oradour *imaginable* , unlike the atrocities in the Nazi camps - I concluded that it was because Oradour is situated in the land of the victims, who were not only deemed wholly innocent but whose fate was consistent with the nation's post-war narrative of *Résistance* (or, less kindly, *Résistancialisme*[54]).

Kluger, like Améry, Levi and Delbo, encountered incomprehension, and sometimes resistance on the part of those to whom she tried to explain the reality of her experiences. The German wife of a Princeton colleague, for example, whom she calls Gisela, 'felt smug about belonging to a younger generation of Germans who couldn't be blamed for anything', declaring that 'Theresienstadt wasn't all that bad' (bid.: 80). 'Gisela's remarks', recalls Kluger, 'were a provocation and unmistakeably aggressive. I'm sure she resented that in warm weather I didn't wear long sleeves to cover up the Auschwitz number tattooed on my arm, or try to hide it with bracelets or cosmetics, to mention two of the suggestions I received in the course of fifty years. "Theresienstadt was a ghetto for old people and Jewish veterans", she says, reciting a bit of German folklore' (ibid.: 80-1). Auschwitz, Gisela admitted, was another matter, but compared to her own mother, who lost her husband on the Russian front and could not remarry due to the shortage of available German men after the war, she suggested that Kluger's mother, whose father and son were murdered, was comparatively lucky, as she found two more husbands in America. (ibid.: 88).

[54] The term coined by the French historian Henry Rousso in 1987 to describe the post-war exaggeration of the importance and extent of French resistance activities during the German occupation, especially by Gaullist and Communist politicians.

More generally, though, it was just the case that talking of experiences such as the journey from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz, she didn't fit the 'framework of social discourse'. Like the other survivors Kluger feared that her description for example, of the feeling of claustrophobia she experienced in the cattle truck to Auschwitz might invoke in the minds of her listeners the feeling they might have experienced of being stuck in a lift, in the Channel Tunnel between England and France, or, for those who experienced it, in an air-raid shelter. She sums up her experience as a testifier in terms which echo those of Delbo and her comrades:

> I used to think after the war I would have something of interest and significance to tell. A contribution. But people didn't want to hear about it, or if they did listen, it was in a certain pose, an attitude assumed for this special occasion….as if I had imposed upon them, and they were graciously indulging me. The current craze for oral history and interviewing harbors a related flaw of one-sidedness, even though the interviewer is doing the imposing: he or she contributes nothing except an implied superiority to suffering. Beware the kind of awe which easily turns to its opposite, disgust. For we like to keep the objects of both emotions at arms-length, in instinctive revulsion (ibid.: 107).

Perhaps Kluger overstates her case, and is too harsh in relation to the oral history 'industry', but she does raise a very pertinent question. The European Holocaust Research Institute, according to a tweet I accessed on 1st June 2021, enables you to browse 2,200 archival institutions in 59 countries. One of these is the Institute for Visual History and Education, in the USC Shoah Foundation, at the University of Southern California (originally founded by Steven Spielberg), which, according to its website (sfi.usc.edu) contains over 54,000 audiovisual testimonies from Jewish and other survivors of the Third Reich, mainly recorded between 1994 and 2001. Hugely impressive , of course, but what exactly are these testimonies for? If it is academic research, why does one need to create 54,000 testimonies, and thus invoke 54,0000 sets of traumatic memories? Is it a necessary act of scholarship, a bulwark against Holocaust denial, or for some other reason? And at what psychic and emotional cost on the part of testifiers were they obtained, relative to the benefit to historians and other academic consumers they undoubtedly provide?

Kluger is also unsparing in her critique of German public and private memory of their own actions in the past. She speaks, for example, of the many 'well-meaning' Germans who used forced labourers as unpaid servants during the War, and who talk of them being well off, well fed, content, and grateful, without apparently having seen any signs of anxiety, suspicion, or enmity towards them, in their faces, and who recoil when Kluger refers to them as slave labour. In the aftermath of the War, she recalls from personal experience, German hatred and contempt for Jews didn't cease, but merely became subliminal. The Jews were hated by all generations of Germans, even if they disagreed about who or what was to blame for what happened in the past, because Jews reminded them just by their presence of what they had done. Survivors, on the other hand, either 'outdid one another with stories of their suffering or they wanted to leave all that behind in order to focus on the future' (ibid.: 191). Kluger remembers that her German neighbours treated the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials 'with distaste'. They didn't want to know about the crimes committed in their own name, as if turning away from the facts was proof of their own innocence, and found it easier instead to accuse investigators and observers of engaging in a deliberate humiliation of the German people. This attitude, she claims, prevailed right up to the time of the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial. As in the case of the other survivors, Kluger found the existential and moral chasm between her and Germans fundamentally unbridgeable. It was not the case, however, that she hated or could no longer identify with the country or its people; on the contrary when she left Germany in 1947, she said, she felt that 'part of me was irreversibly German, albeit in an offbeat way' (ibid. :194).

9.5 Jean Améry: The Intellectual's Experience of Auschwitz

Jean Améry, unlike Kluger, felt that he could no longer self-identify even partly as a German, but nevertheless he too found that part of him was irreversibly German, and it was the part of which mattered to him above all else: his intellectual and cultural being. This is directly reflected in the title of the first of the essays he wrote for South German Radio, on his experience of Auschwitz, written in early 1964 and broadcast by Améry to its listeners in October of that year- *At the Mind's Limits. Essay on the Intellectual's Experience of Auschwitz*. His essay, Améry declared, would be about 'the confrontation of Auschwitz and intellect' rather than a 'documentary report' (an indirect reference to Levi's book, notes Heidelberger-Leonard) about the horrors of the camp, about which 'people have already heard far too

much' (Améry,1999: 15), This seemingly esoteric choice, though, was in reality a profoundly serious cultural as well as a personal one. Améry hoped that his essays would help him to rediscover himself, and be rediscovered by others, as a German intellectual and writer—writing, as he was later to say, *for Germans* rather than merely *in German*, as he had been doing as a journalist, writing 'feuilletonistic' articles for German-Swiss journals, for the previous twenty years. His essay was thus intended both to offer a new perspective on the question of the victim's existence in Auschwitz and a means of introducing Améry as a serious thinker and writer to fellow left-wing German intellectuals like the programme's producer, the poet and writer Helmut Heisenbüttel. As a result, as Améry himself confirms in his Preface, the earlier part of his essay is self-consciously 'essayistic' and 'contemplative', before becoming gradually more subjective and 'confessional', and finally a frank and unsparing account of his own intellectual and spiritual submission to the reality of the camp. Nevertheless, the tone of the essay remains throughout distinctly more essayistic and reflective than that of his later essays, and particular his essay *Resentments*.

The essay begins with a portrait of the 'intellectual or cultivated man'- someone not just defined by their training or occupation, such as a lawyer, doctor, engineer or scholar, but also:

> 'a person who lives within a spiritual frame of reference in the widest sense. His realm of thought is an essentially humanistic one, that of the liberal arts. He has a well-developed esthetic consciousness. By inclination and ability he tends towards abstract trains of thought' (ibid.: 2).

Améry is of course describing himself, and his self-portrait is deliberately ironic in the context of the experience he is about to describe. The personal attributes of this cultural paragon he details - the ability to 'recite great poetry by the stanza', to know 'famous paintings of the Renaissance as well as those of Surrealism', and the possession of a keen knowledge of history and philosophy - are not merely useless, but also hazardous, and even life-threatening, in the dis-ordered, brutalised, 'social' world of Auschwitz. In Monowitz, the treatment, and ultimately the fate, of prisoners, was determined not by their intellect but by their utility and their skills as tradespeople. Machinists, electricians, plumbers, cabinet makers, carpenters, tailors, shoemakers, bricklayers, cooks and mechanics could earn

themselves vital privileges, such as an extra bowl of watery soup, and have a slightly improved chance of survival. Those from the 'higher professions', on the other hand, are counted in Auschwitz as an *underclass,* fit only for unskilled labouring work, with a few lucky exceptions, such as 'my barracks mate Primo Levi from Turin, who wrote the Auschwitz book, If That Be a Man' (ibid.:3) and indeed Améry himself, whose orthographical skills secured him a clerical position in the Buna offices. The prudent intellectual thus sought to conceal his true background, and if he had any manual skills, however rudimentary, to claim to be a craftsman, or he would end up spending his days carrying rails, pipes or construction beams, and soon be 'eliminated from the labor process' (ibid.:3-4). Camp life generally, Améry noted, also required physical agility and courage 'that necessarily bordered on brutality'. Moral courage, on the other hand 'was not worth a trifle'(ibid.:4). Members of the higher professions typically lacked such necessary skills for daily existence as the ability to 'deliver an uppercut' to a would-be thief, or make their beds in the prescribed way, or respond briskly enough to the 'Caps off' command, and so were disrespected by the *kapos* and other prisoners. They could find themselves friendless, unless they made the effort to communicate on the level of ordinary prisoners, in camp slang, and what would be considered in their former cultivated circles as rude or ill-mannered language.

Moreover, notes Améry, unlike in camps such as Dachau or Buchenwald, in which the prisoners were predominantly political, and books and even a Camp Library were available to provide inmates with some interior intellectual life and help them function socially, in Auschwitz the great majority of prisoners were unpolitical Jews and Poles, and the most privileged and influential prisoners were the German professional criminals. As a result, the intellectual was isolated, having little opportunity to socialise with others like himself. Nor did Améry find solace in memory, unlike Levi, who recalled the spiritually uplifting effect of being able to recite in rudimentary French translation some partly remembered lines of the Canto of Ulysses from Dante's Inferno to his comrade Jean Samuel. Améry recalled that when he recollected a previously much repeated stanza from a poem of Friedrich Hölderlin, it evoked no emotional or mental response , as it always had done in former times. 'The poem no longer transcended reality', he recalls (ibid.:7). A special problem, he added, afflicted intellectuals like himself who possessed a German educational and cultural background, for the 'language' of Auschwitz, which he described as 'camp slang', demonstrated to them that

German culture no longer belonged to them, but to their captors, and that in this, as in every other way, even the lowest ranking SS man was superior to them.

But as spiritually and socially handicapped as Améry may have been , one might expect that the 'rational-analytic' mind of a neo-positivist thinker like himself would at least have offered some kind of bulwark against the irrational 'logic of destruction' of Auschwitz. Not so, says Améry; on the contrary, 'it led straight into a tragic dialectic of self-destruction' (ibid. :10). It was certainly true, he said, that in the beginning his rational-analytic mind prevented him from simply accepting and adjusting to the realities of the camp's logic of destruction, since it was contrary to everything he had previously considered humanly acceptable, and so what others accepted as their fate he felt obliged to oppose. But as time wore on, and that logic became an immovable and permanent reality, he said, the innate respect for the authority of power which is a characteristic of the German intellectual, began to undermine his resistance. His knowledge of the many previous historical instances of subjugation and slavery, for example, made him wonder whether his situation was not, in historical context, simply the way it was, and had always been. And so eventually his mind turned inward, against itself:

> The power structure of the SS state towered up before the [intellectual] prisoner monstrously and indomitably, a reality that could not be escaped and therefore finally seemed *reasonable*.' (ibid.).

Militant Marxists, Jehovah's Witnesses, pious Christians, and Orthodox Jews, whether highly educated professionals or workers and peasants, on the other hand he said, had a spiritual foothold in the world which enabled them to detach themselves from the 'SS state'. As a result they 'survived better or died with more dignity than their irreligious or unpolitical intellectual comrades, who often were infinitely better educated and more practised in exact thinking' (ibid. :13). Améry could not bring himself to believe what they believed, but sincerely wished he could be like them - 'part of a spiritual continuity that is interrupted nowhere, not even in Auschwitz' (ibid. :14). For Améry and other non-believers, on the other hand, the 'cruel sharpness of an intellect honed and hardened by camp reality' dismissed all metaphysical explanations for their situation as meaningless. Nowhere was reality as real as it was in Auschwitz, and in no other place was any attempt to transcend it 'so hopeless and

so shoddy'(ibid.:9). Améry declared that no spiritual good could be salvaged from the experience of the camp - he did not become wiser 'if by wisdom one understands positive knowledge of the world', nor 'deeper', nor 'better, more human, more humane and more mature ethically', though he undoubtedly became 'smarter'(ibid.:20). Far from finding the camp a 'university for life', as Levi claimed he had done, Améry summarised the existential legacy of the non-believing intellectual[55] in the following terms:

> You do not observe dehumanized man committing his deeds and misdeeds without having all your notions of inherent human dignity placed in doubt. We emerged from the camp stripped, robbed, emptied out, disorientated—and it was a long time before we were even able to learn the ordinary language of freedom. Still today, incidentally, we speak it with discomfort and without real trust in its validity. (ibid.)

The one valuable intellectual legacy of Auschwitz, he added, was the unshakeable belief that 'for the greatest part the intellect is a *ludus* [game] and that we are nothing more- or, better said, before we entered the camp we were nothing more- than *homines ludentes'* [players] (ibid.) It made the intellectual lose his 'metaphysical conceit', his 'naïve joy in the intellect' and 'what we falsely imagined was the sense of life'. Sartre, he noted ironically, said that it had taken him thirty years to rid himself of traditional philosophical idealism, but a few weeks in the camp had been sufficient for Améry to complete that process. The Austrian writer Karl Kraus, he noted, said of the Third Reich that 'The word[56] fell into a sleep when that world awoke'. The intellectual survivor, though, said Améry, felt rather that it had died:

> The word always dies where the claim of some reality is total. It died for us a long time ago. And we were not even left with the feeling that we must regret its departure (ibid.).

The starker reality of being a prisoner in Auschwitz for Jewish prisoners like Améry, however, was the fact of their being Jews, and this, as Améry admits in his Preface to the first edition

[55] Améry often refers to himself in the third person, or uses the collective 'we', but I found no evidence that he was in fact a part of any self-defining group of non-believing Jewish-German intellectuals , and indeed his emphasis on his isolation implies that this was not the case, so I read this as more of a stylistic device than a reflection of his real experience- possibly a means of facilitating the engagement of his audience.
[56] Meaning the mind, or intellectual life

of *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne* is something he had not seen clearly enough in 1964, when writing his essay. It was however frankly revealed by Améry in his 1977 essay *Mein Judentum:*

> In the abyss, all the "aryan" prisoners were on a level so far *above* us, the Jews, that it can be measured only in light years. They beat us when it pleased them; especially the Poles distinguished themselves at this, in a way that is unforgettable, and should not be concealed. They had internalized the Führer's values - because tradition had trained them for it. They may have been destined to be slaves of the master race; but we were signed over for death. It reached the point where we Jews allowed ourselves to be beaten without resistance. (Améry, 1984: 18).

Améry's essay on the intellectual in Auschwitz therefore needs to be understood in the context of the basis on which it was commissioned; that is as a carefully crafted portrayal of his experience *as an intellectual* of Auschwitz, designed for an audience of fellow intellectuals. To judge Améry by any other criterion risks ascribing to him a lack of self-awareness and insensitivity which is quite contrary to what we know of him. In this context, Améry's essay seems to me to constitute a brutally honest, deeply moving, and original introspective account of a mind at its absolute limits – in fact, on the point of self-destruction. But it is also about the total failure of German culture and education (including his own) to withstand the reality of National Socialism, written not for the benefit of the war generation of Germans but to inform and educate an emerging post-war generation of leftist intellectuals concerning his and their past. Améry knew that a much fuller picture of the reality of Auschwitz had already emerged, *inter alia*, in Levi's book, but he also knew that it had been published at a time when the vast majority of Germans of the war generation were still clinging to the myths concerning the Third Reich which Dr. T.H. had regurgitated to Levi. Young Germans, on the other hand, had been intentionally kept ignorant of such matters, as Améry had already made clear in his chapter on Germany in his 1961 book *Preface to the Future,* and the Frankfurt trial had been proceeding for too little time to have permeated their consciousness. Consequently, I think the subject matter of his Auschwitz essay was rather well judged and well timed from a didactic perspective, though it was destined, like Levi's book, to bear little practical fruit, as far as its impact on its listeners and readers was concerned.

9.6 Améry and the Germans

Améry did not directly address the question of his attitude towards contemporary West German society until he wrote his fourth essay, 'Resentments', (which he had originally wanted to call 'The Germans') at the end of 1965. Heidelberger-Leonard records that Améry warned Heissenbüttel, his radio producer, of the potentially controversial nature of the essay, telling him: 'It is "strong stuff". I hope not too strong for your listeners. But it is like this: such an essay can either be written with complete honesty or not written at all.' (Heidelberger-Leonard, 2010: 161). But as Heidelberger-Leonard points out, it was far from the 'tirade of hatred' that many of its German readers took it to be. As Améry says towards the end of the essay: 'If you wish, I bear my grudge for reasons of personal salvation. Certainly. On the other hand, however, it is also for the good of the German people'. (Améry, 1999: 80). On the one hand he wanted his listeners, and later his readers, to acknowledge the righteousness of his resentments against German society past and present, but on the other hand, it was his 'absurd' dream, he said, that their response to his resentments might, as Heidelberger-Leonard puts it, 'redeem' him - bring about an end to the loneliness he felt as a result, as he saw it, of having been abandoned by German society. Heidelberger-Leonard describes this as a longing for 'requited love' (Heidelberger-Leonard, 2010: 162). I am not sure about that, but there is no doubt that Améry's emotional investment in his quest was considerable.

Améry's essay was not the first time he had written about the German people, though, reveals Heidelberger-Leonard. In June 1945, barely three months after his liberation, in what she calls an 'astonishingly objective' but unpublished, essay entitled *Zur Psychologie des deutsches Volken* ('On the Psychology of the German People'), he had advocated the 'integral physical extermination of all the leading personalities in the [Nazi] Party (….) and the entire staff of the State Secret Police' (ibid.: 81). However, she says, he had judged the German people as a whole with surprising leniency in that essay, which was written at a time when, as Améry himself recalled in 1965, he was enjoying 'a totally unprecedented social and moral status', both as a survivor and a former resistance fighter, which 'elated me to the extreme'(Améry, 1999: 64). In any event, in 1945 he had deemed the German people to be not *actively* guilty collectively of the crimes suffered in the concentration camps but guilty without exception of not publicly opposing them. For this, he said, they should not be punished but 're-educated', though it seems that he was not specific about how this could be

achieved in practice (Heidelberger-Leonard, 2010: 84). Améry had also favoured at that time the implementation of the Morgenthau Plan, proposed by the U.S. Senator Henry Morgenthau, for the de-industrialization of Germany and its conversion into a primarily agrarian economy, to counter the danger of a resurgent Germany once more threatening the world.

If Améry's essay 'On the Psychology of the German People' might be characterized as 'optimistic', albeit in a rather radically militant way, that optimism had dissipated by 1965. The Cold War between the Soviet bloc and the West had already refashioned Germany as a 'democratic' bulwark against Communism, and far from being de-industrialized, the country had been politically rehabilitated and economically reconstructed, without being required to atone for, or even admit to, any collective responsibility for the evils of National Socialism. Moreover, the German people had neither been compulsorily re-educated, as Améry had suggested, nor demonstrated any serious disposition to re-educate themselves. Améry's assessment of this process is subtly ironic:

> Under these circumstances – circumstances of unprecedented economic, industrial and military rise – one cannot reasonably demand of someone that he go on tearing his hair and beating his breast. The Germans saw themselves absolutely as victims, since, after all, they had been compelled to survive not only the winter battles of Leningrad and Stalingrad, not only the bombardment of their cities, but also the dismemberment of their country. Thus, as can all too easily be understood, they were not inclined to do more than to take the past of the Third Reich and in their own way to "overcome" it, as one said back then. In those days, at the same time as the Germans were conquering the world markets for their industrial products and were busy at home – not without a certain equanimity – with overcoming, our resentments increased; or perhaps I must restrain myself and say only that my resentments increased (Améry, 1999: 66).

Améry became one of the 'disapproving minority with its hard feelings'. 'I attracted the disapproving attention,' he recalled, 'no less of my former fellows in battle and suffering, who were now gushing over about reconciliation, than of my enemies who had been converted to tolerance. I preserved my resentments' (ibid.: 67). By the beginning of the

1960s, though, Améry was beginning to have 'something to do' with German intellectuals of his own generation, whom he found had 'rediscovered' themselves as 'refined, modest and tolerant', and also 'thoroughly modern', earnestly discussing Theodor Adorno, Saul Bellow, or Natalie Sarraute[57] with the same enthusiasm he envisaged that during the Nazi period, they had probably extolled the works of authors of the popular 'Blood and Soil' school of writers (ibid.: 62).

Améry's resentments were probably not allayed by the outcome of the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial, which ended shortly before his essay was broadcast, though he does not refer to it in his essay. There being no death penalty under German municipal law, the prosecution in the trial had requested a maximum sentence for murder of life imprisonment in relation to 16 of the 20 remaining defendants, but of the 17 actually found guilty, only 7 were found guilty of murder, and received the maximum sentence, whilst the remaining 10 defendants, including the most senior ranking defendant, Mulka, were found guilty only of accessory to murder, and, with the exception of Mulka, sentenced to imprisonment for periods of less than 10 years. One of the medical staff, Dr Lucas, for example, who participated in four selections of 1,000 prisoners for the gas chambers, received a sentence of just three and a half years (Pendas, 2006: 100- 102). Améry would certainly have read reports of the trial in the German and foreign press, and been aware not only of the leniency of these sentences, but also of some questionable aspects of the trial process. Among these were the hostile and intimidating manner in which survivor witnesses, and particularly those from the Communist countries, notably Poland and Ukraine, had been cross-examined by defence counsel, the requirement for survivors giving evidence in the presence of their former torturers, and the Court's repeated insistence on a high level of detail and precision in witness testimony (ibid.: 162-4). He might also have been aware of what Pendas refers to as the dialectical relationship between media fascination with the trial and the public reaction to it - the more strident the former became the more indifferent or opposed to the trial the public seemed to be (ibid.: 258). Though undoubtedly significant in its effect on public perceptions of Nazism and the Holocaust, Pendas records that public opinion polls revealed that only 53% of those who *actually attended* the trial approved of it, that many Germans, even after the trial, still

[57] The part- Jewish, Russian born, French novelist and essayist, who survived the War living on false papers and subsequently became a leading theorist and practitioner of the 'nouveau roman' school of fiction.

opposed extending the Statute of Limitation periods for Nazi crimes, including the then Federal Justice Minister, Edwald Bucher, and that 44% of Germans polled in 1966 continued to oppose the holding of such trials.

In any event, Améry made it crystal clear that in examining his resentments for the purpose of his essay, he would be *tactless*, for tact, he said, 'is not suited for the radical analysis that together we are striving for here' (ibid.: 63). His task, he said, was not just to explain his resentments, but to *justify* them. Whatever his awareness of the feelings of ordinary Germans towards the Frankfurt trial, he was certainly more attuned to the *zeitgeist* of contemporary Germany than Levi had been in 1961 (and had in fact analysed it in detail in that same year in his book *Preface to the Future*). Consequently, Améry's case for his resentments was firmly based on the state of contemporary German society as well as its past failings, and especially the fact that 'personalities who were allied with the torturers' continued to play important public roles in German society, and that 'the criminals have a good chance to attain a venerable old age and triumphantly outlive us' (ibid.: 63-4). The Germany of 1965 thus still reminds him of the German Reich:

> Fateful land, where some stand eternally in the light and others eternally in the darkness. I travelled the length and breadth of it in the evacuation trains that, under the pressure of the final Soviet offensive, carried us from Auschwitz westward and later from Buchenwald to Bergen-Belsen. When the tracks led us through the snow across a corner of the Bohemian countryside, the peasant women came running to the death train with bread and apples and had to be chased off through shots into the air by the escort party. But in the Reich: faces of stone. A proud people still. The pride has grown a bit stout, I'll admit. It no longer squeezes out between grinding jaws but gleams in the contentment of good conscience and the understandable joy of having made it once again. It no longer cites heroism on the battlefield but the productivity that has no like in the entire world. Still the old pride, and on our side the old helplessness. Woe to the conquered (ibid. :80-1).

It is not difficult to see how this might seem like hatred, but what Améry really wanted his audience to understand was that his resentments were not only historically justified, but also that they were not of the morally condemnable kind depicted by Nietzsche in his book *The*

Genealogy of Morals - not manifestations of what Nietzsche conceived as 'slave morality'.[58] Rather, they were, as Thomas Brudholm puts it, 'a legitimate and valuable form of anger responding to perceived moral wrongs' (Brudholm, 2008: 9). Améry opposed Nietzsche's conceptual notion of *ressentiment* with the concrete reality of personal experience. Equally, he opposed the notion that his resentments were simply the manifestation of some post-traumatic psychological disorder, as he had read them described, or at least if they were, he declared, the 'warped' state of survivors constituted 'a form of the human condition that morally as well as historically is of a higher order than that of healthy straightness' (ibid. :68).

What, then, did Améry actually want his listeners and readers to *do* in order to alleviate his resentments, assuming they accepted that they were justified? His 'moral daydream' he said, was that young Germans - those who bore no direct or indirect responsibility for the crimes of that period - could join with him in wanting to fulfil his 'dis-ordered' desire for two impossible things: 'regression into the past and nullification of what had happened'. How they did this, he said, was for them to determine, but he suggested they to reject *everything* that was done during the period 1933-45, including even beneficial products of the period such as the Autobahns. In his ' moral daydream', he envisaged turning back time itself, because whilst time had helped to heal the wounds of German society, by allowing the perpetrators to reintegrate into it and 'dissolve in its consensus', it had left the victim's wounds unhealed. His 'absurd' demand to turn back time thus represents a moral protest against temporal reality and the perception of time as a *natural* healer. This is why any re-engagement between Germans and victims like Améry cannot take the form of reconciliation, but rather of them joining him in *refusing to be reconciled* to what happened in the past (Brudholm, 2008:116).

In the meantime, Améry argues, it is upon the survivors such as himself, rather than the German people, that the burden of collective guilt falls, because they alone are *burdened* by the knowledge that the German people, with some exceptions (which he celebrates but finds statistically insignificant) are guilty of the crimes and atrocities of the Third Reich, not in the sense of having all committed them, but in the sense that the term embraces 'guilt of deed,

[58] A useful summary of Nietzsche's notion of 'ressentiment' in the specific context of Améry's essay can be found in Vetlesen, 2006, pp. 27-9.

guilt of omission, guilt of utterance, and guilt of silence' (ibid.: 73). Yet if he ventures to voice his resentments to young Germans who have grown up 'in the calm climate of a new German democracy', and know little of their past, he fears they will just sound like 'stagnant, Old Testament, barbaric hate'(ibid.: 75). In a German weekly, for example, Améry reads a letter from an obviously young man from Kassel, who is 'sick and tired of hearing again and again that our fathers killed six million Jews', and equates that crime with American 'bombings', or British murders in the Boer War (ibid.; 75-6). Améry *wants* the young people like the correspondent from Kassel to be free of collective guilt for the past, but only if they *earn* that freedom by accepting that Hitler and his deeds are and will continue to be part of German history and German tradition.

But, as he himself predicted, Améry would fail to 'goad ' young Germans into redeeming their past, whether in concrete or spiritual terms. He was both too early, because they did yet not know enough about that past, and too late, because they had already grown up, largely contentedly, in a modern, tolerant and democratic society which had successfully buried it. The future turned out in fact to be was worse than he had predicted, because when left-wing German youth finally revolted against Fascism, it was in the form of a sometimes violent revolt against what they perceived as the Fascism of their own democracy, rather than a spiritual revolt against the real fascism of the Nazi period. Worse still, in Améry's view, one consequence of that perceived struggle was to give birth to a new, leftist anti-Semitism, in the 'respectable' guise of anti-Zionism. In his Preface to the 1977 Reissue of *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne* Améry recalled learning that at a 'rally for the Palestinians' in a large German city the 'young agitated antifascists' had been heard to cry "Death to the Jewish people". He continued:

> I would never have dreamed it when the first edition of my book appeared in 1966 and I had no other enemies except my natural ones: the Nazis, old and new, the irrationalists and fascists, the reactionary pack that had brought death to the world. That today I must stand up against my natural friends, the young men and women of the Left, is more than overtaxed "dialectics". It is one of those bad farces of world history that make one doubt the sense of all historical occurrence and in the end despair (ibid.: x).

At the end of his Preface Améry concluded: 'Nothing has healed, and what perhaps was already on the point of healing in 1964 is bursting open again as an infected wound'. (ibid.: xi). But if this verdict, and much of Améry's writing more generally, seems unremittingly bleak, it must be borne in mind that it was the verdict of an idealist, who had persisted in holding on to his moral daydreams, and resisting the tide of history, to the point of absurdity and thus he had always been destined to fall farther, and land harder, than realists such as Levi.

CHAPTER 10. DEALING WITH THE PAST

10.1 Introduction

Améry's analysis of his tortured relationship with the German people illustrates that catastrophe testimony is concerned not only with conveying information concerning the past, but also with *dealing with* the past. Naturally, this is less evident in the case of testimonial accounts written shortly after the occurrence of the catastrophic experience in question, such as Levi's *If This Is a Man*, or Delbo's *None of Us Will Return* and *Useless Knowledge*, when the cognitive and existential distance between the testifier and the event is at its shortest, and the main preoccupation of testifiers is to get others to listen to their stories. We see that, for example, in Levi's nightmare of telling his story to an indifferent audience, or the urgency of Delbo's insistence that others must be *made to see* the reality of her suffering and that of her comrades. The need to deal with the past, rather than just revealing it, on the other hand, is evident in those works featured in the preceding two chapters which were produced many years after the occurrence of the catastrophic experiences to which they relate, notably Freedman's *One Hour in Paris*, Améry's *At the Mind's Limits*, and Levi's *The Drowned and the Saved*. Moreover the past which has to be dealt with in such works encompasses not only the catastrophic event, but also the experience of surviving it.

As the testimonies examined in the preceding two chapters reveal, the issue of dealing with the past is in fact two issues: the introspective issue of dealing with one's own past, and the political, social, cultural and moral issue of dealing with the experience of being a victim and survivor in the world, and it is this latter issue upon which I focus in this chapter. Freedman seems to me to present the most straightforward assessment task in this respect, not only because of her apparent success, after a very difficult beginning, in managing her post-traumatic condition, but also because her catastrophic experience was one which is universal and continuing in most societies and thus familiar, even where it is not understood or fully acknowledged, and has also become increasingly sympathetically viewed in recent years. She is thus able to offer both a frank and unflinching account of her experience and its legacy, and a positive and forward-looking account of her present situation. Levi's book, on the other hand, is the least straightforward to assess, because although it deals with a wide range of issues relevant to the experience of concentration camps, and surviving them, it deals largely

with other people's experience of persecution, in relation to which Levi assumes his preferred role of witness rather than protagonist. There are, though two chapters of his book in which Levi takes a distinctly personal stance. The first of these is his chapter on the reception of *If This Is a Man* by its German readers which I have already discussed, though his stated objective there is to try to understand how his readers dealt with *their* past. The second is a chapter I have not previously discussed, which is the chapter of *The Drowned and the Saved* Levi devoted to Améry entitled 'The Intellectual in Auschwitz'. Ostensibly it is a critique of Améry's Auschwitz essay 'At the Mind's Limits' but in essence it is a broader critique of Améry's world view as a survivor which in turn leads to Levi examining his existence as a survivor. Having already delivered my interpretation of Améry's views in the preceding two chapters, I want to focus in this chapter on the issue of how Levi perceived, or at least purported to perceive, Améry, and what that says about Levi and his attitude to dealing with the past. This, in turn, leads to a discussion of the general issue of how the past can or should be dealt with by survivors of catastrophic experiences, and also the recipients of their accounts.

10.2 Levi vs. Améry

There were many differences between Levi and Améry on a personal, existential and social level, and also one much-discussed difficulty in their relationship (which seems to have been entirely conducted through hearsay and correspondence) which is not central to the issues raised herein, but is excellently summarised and more widely contextualized in Heidelberger-Leonard, 2010 (pp.65-71), and also discussed, *inter alia*, in Stille (1990), Thomson (2003), Vetlesen (2006), and Cheyette (2013). In brief, Améry was transferred to the Buna Works in June 1944, and recalled having encountered Levi there, though Levi claimed to have no recollection of him. The two men never met in person after their liberation but both became correspondents of Hety Schmitt-Maas. In the course of his correspondance with Schmitt-Maas, in response to her probably unintentionally provocative praise of Levi as a man who seemed 'entirely free of resentment' Améry apparently commented that, 'Unlike Levi, I am not a man to forgive', a suggestion which stung Levi, and which he apparently vigorously refuted (Heidelberger-Leonard, 2010 :66-7). It therefore seems plausible to suggest that this unfortunate exchange was at least in part responsible for Levi's subsequent critique of Améry's book. However, to devote an entire chapter of *The Saved and the Drowned* to a

posthumous critique of what Levi described as an 'icy and bitter' work, with which one assumes the vast majority of his readers were unfamiliar, seems to be a rather disproportionate and belated form of retaliation, as well as supremely ironic in its implied characterisation of Levi as a man of resentment!

In any event, the passage of Levi's critique upon which I want to focus in this Section relates to an episode recounted not in Améry's Auschwitz essay but in his final *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne* essay*: '*On the Necessity and Impossibility of Being a Jew'. In this passage, Améry is recalling being hit in the face by an Auschwitz *Kapo* called Juszek - a 'Polish professional criminal of horrifying vigour'- for some trifling offence, as was Juszek's usual practice, whereupon Améry returned the blow, striking Juszek in his face. 'My human dignity lay in this punch to his jaw', recalled Améry, though as a result he was 'woefully thrashed' by the stronger man. He continues:

> Painfully beaten, I was satisfied with myself. But not, as one might think, for reasons of courage and honor, but only because I had grasped well that there are situations in life in which our body is our entire self and our entire fate. I was my body and nothing else: in hunger, in the blow that I suffered, in the blow that I dealt. My body, debilitated and crusted with filth, was my calamity. My body, when it tensed to strike, was my physical and metaphysical dignity. In situations like mine, physical violence is the sole means for restoring a disjointed personality. (Améry, 1999: 90-1).

Returning the blow in a wider spiritual and social sense, became, Améry declares, the foundation of his attitude towards the world as a survivor, the blow in question being the world's failure to restore his dignity as a human being deemed worthy of life. He had been particularly affected in the years following his return from captivity by news of continued anti-Semitic disturbances in Poland, including the murder of Jews who had returned to reclaim their former properties, the unwelcoming attitude to returning Jewish survivors among the 'ever sickly petty bourgeoisie' in France, and the talk of a 'Jewish Problem' in Holland, as well as the British government's efforts to prevent Jewish survivors of the camps entering Palestine. He decided at that time that whilst he had to accept as a reality the continuing 'world verdict' on Jews, including himself, as being not worthy of life, rather than

seeking introspective consolation in the form of burnishing his sense of self-worth, he would adopt a public stance of protest against that verdict : 'I became a person not by subjectively appealing to my abstract humanity but by discovering myself within the given social reality as a rebelling Jew and by realizing myself as one' (ibid.: 91).

Levi offers a meta-narrative on Améry's description of the incident between Juszek and himself, in 'The Intellectual in Auschwitz', though, without giving its wider political and philosophical context, contrasting Améry's action with his own 'intrinsic incapacity' to 'return the blow': ' "Trading punches" is an experience I do not have, as far back as I can go in memory; nor can I say I regret not having it' he observes (Levi, 1987: 109). He confesses his 'absolute inferiority' in this respect, and his admiration for Améry's choice to' leave the ivory tower and go down into the battlefield', both as a prisoner and a survivor, but comments that it 'led him to positions of such severity and intransigence as to make him incapable of finding joy in life, indeed of living'. 'Trading blows' with the world, Levi concluded, could only end in defeat for the individual, and this, he suggested, provided one explanation for Améry's eventual suicide. (ibid. : 110). Rather cleverly, Levi follows this assessment with a repudiation of Améry's description of himself as a 'forgiver', whilst conceding that if he had suffered everything Améry had suffered, he too might have become a more resentful survivor.

Leaving aside the question of whether and to what extent Levi's critique might have contained an element of personal animus, it raises a fundamental question for survivors of collective catastrophic experiences, which is whether there is any morally 'right' way to re-engage specifically with perpetrator societies, insofar as they feel the need to do so. Améry's response to that challenge had been intensely subjective and also cultural, not only because he was a survivor, but also because he was, or had been, a German. Levi, on the other hand, had in 1961 chosen to remain above that particular battlefield, which he no doubt felt perfectly entitled to do as an Italian, declaring only that his personal mission was to 'understand' Germans. Vetlesen (2006), notes that Levi is generally regarded, in taking this stance, as someone whose evident humanism commands great respect, in the light of his experiences. However, he asks whether, as Tzvetan Todorov (1997: 269) suggested, this might have led to Levi ignoring his own warning that 'to understand is almost to justify' and thus a task not best undertaken by the victim. Vetlesen further suggests that when Levi said

he wanted to 'understand' Germans, he was in reality attempting to fight his own feelings of resentment against them by portraying the ability to rise above such feelings as a *virtue*. Consequently he suggests that Levi's 'posthumous argument' with Améry should be seen not primarily as 'an intellectual dispute or a discourse on morality' but essentially as Levi's struggle against himself - as Levi's way of justifying to himself a suppression of his own resentments towards Germans, in other words - 'thus confirming', opines Vetlesen, ' the received psychological wisdom that what we cannot tolerate in ourselves we attack and reject when encountering it in others' (Vetlesen, 2006; 41). Vetlesen's analysis broadly fits my own reading of Levi's essay, but I would also suggest, more generally, that resentment is the *natural*, if rarer, condition of the survivor of a catastrophic experience whereas 'understanding' is the *unnatural,* if more common (because undertaken in the belief that it is more morally praiseworthy and more socially acceptable) suppression of it. Further, resentment, especially where it represents a reaction against immoral social pressure to forgive or be reconciled, is, as Améry maintained, a distinctly morally *unambiguous* reaction, whereas 'understanding' is a distinctly morally *ambiguous* one. As Vetlesen observes, 'What Améry helps provide is a factor that society needs in order to be a *decent* society' (ibid. :44), though of course society does not always appreciate such help. In short, I would argue that the natural existential and moral role of the survivor of an atrocity committed against him relative to the former perpetrators *is that of* a *plaintiff, not a judge.*

In arguing against Levi in this specific context, however, I have no wish to accuse him of moral cowardice. The difference between Améry and himself was, as Levi suggests, both a matter of temperament, and also the fact that Améry, unlike Levi, had lost too much - his country, his wife, his culture, and his identity - to be 'understanding' in his dealings with German society. Levi in fact exhibited great moral courage in *The Drowned and the Saved* in endeavouring to some extent to speak on behalf the 'Drowned', such as the Auschwitz *Sonderkommando*. This may have led to feelings, if not of survivor guilt then at least of what Bryan Cheyette calls 'ethical uncertainty'- a desire to avoid Manichaean distinctions between good and evil. It also, suggests Cheyette, made Levi aware of 'the provisional nature of all forms of story-telling in relation to the Holocaust' (Cheyette, 2013:272). No such uncertainty, on the other hand, is apparent in *If This is a Man*, written forty years earlier, which seems to me to be notable for Levi's realism and unambiguous frankness, for

example concerning his attitude towards his own survival. It does not shirk from revealing the ruthlessness, and self- serving mental and physical toughness and 'strange callousness' as he calls it, that he, and all survivors, had required to see them through the experience of Auschwitz. This implies that his attitude in Auschwitz might have always been closer to that of Améry than he later cared to admit. In fact, I concur with the assessment of Alexander Stille that:

> Underneath the measured tones of Levi's prose, there is a tough-minded, unflinching realism, and beneath the harsh, bitter surface of Améry's writing is a desperate belief in sweet reason and dialogue (Stille, 1990:366).

Nevertheless Améry, despite his desire for some kind of mutually redemptive re-engagement with young German intellectuals, was also a realist, for example in seeing, as Levi failed to do, the pointlessness of addressing his resentments to Germans of his own generation. Do survivors of catastrophic experiences, then, have any kind of moral duty to try to understand their persecutors, or do they necessarily derive any benefit from their efforts to do so? Levi's suggestion in 1961 that he wished to understand Germans in order to 'judge' them seems too nebulous to me to suggest he really believed that to be the case, and by the time he wrote *The Drowned and the Saved*, it seems to me that he might have abandoned that project altogether.

10.3 A German Perspective

For a more complete picture of the situation in the Germany of the 1960s and subsequently, though, we should also consider it from a German perspective. The well-known writer and former Judge, Bernard Schlink, who was born in 1944 and thus would have been in the age group targeted in Améry's 'Resentments' essay in 1965, offers a brutally frank insider account of post-war German society's dealings with the past. Schlink writes that young people like himself who tried to confront their parents concerning the past encountered massive hostility, so that, especially in the 1960s, even a private discussion about The Third Reich and the Holocaust 'had to be insisted upon against great resistance' (Schlink, 2008: 26). When, many years later, that resistance was finally broken, Schlink recalled, there followed a period in which the Holocaust was turned into a 'sort of banality', with a stream of books, memorials,

and conferences against forgetting, or the comparison of every awful contemporary event to the Holocaust, until young people simply came to regard the subject as tiresome, like Améry's young man from Kassel, and the schoolmates of the student who wrote to Levi. This banalization, says Schlink, was essentially the successor strategy to the earlier German attempt avoid the task of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* - 'overcoming' or 'mastering' the past – not, as previously, by denying or burying it, but by earning the right, through exemplary commemoration, to draw a line under it. Hence, the sub-title of the German edition of *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne - Bewältigungsversuche eines Überwältigten* (roughly 'Attempts to Overcome by One who was Overcome') - is, perhaps intentionally, ironic. Such efforts, Schlink observes, unless they arouse genuine emotions concerning the past, simply devalue its moral legacy (which was perhaps for some at least the objective). Perhaps, then, one should salute the efforts of some young Germans to seek out the truth concerning the past, and also acknowledge that by no means all of them fell victim to the anti-Zionist Leftist phenomenon Améry described in his Preface to the reissue of his book.

Schlink also concluded in his book, as had Améry, that collective guilt cannot be passed down to successor generations. He even considered whether, specifically in the case of the crimes of the Third Reich, a 'new sort of [collective] guilt' may be required - that of not dissociating oneself from the perpetrator through *renunciation* - which could attach to *anyone* after 1945 (ibid.:15). However, he concludes that whilst the moral and legal-historical case for imposing such guilt might be strong when applied to perpetrator generations, since it justifiably infers some kind of communal solidarity with the perpetrators, it is weak when applied to successor generations, save in the case of those who positively demonstrate a choice to stand in solidarity with past generations.

It seems, therefore that what we learn from the example of the Third Reich is that whilst collective guilt in respect of the crimes of the perpetrators can attach to those of the same generation, the burden of that guilt is highly unlikely to be accepted, or the question of the nature of the crimes in question or the responsibility for them even discussed openly among members of that generation. Thus Hannah Arendt, who made a number of visits to Germany from 1949 onwards, said in 1964, that she had observed two strange phenomena. The first was that Germans who had 'never done any harm in their lives' constantly insisted on talking about how guilty they felt about the Nazi era, yet genuine ex-Nazis seemed to

have the clearest consciences in the world about it. The second was that despite their declared sense of guilt about the past, 'people in Germany had grown astonishingly blasé about the idea that "there are murderers amongst us"' (Arendt, 2007:488). Arendt concluded that confessions by the innocent of feeling guilty were 'phony' and served to cover up the crimes of the genuinely guilty. The concept of collective *guilt ,*she argued, was in any event purely metaphorical, since an innocent person cannot *be* guilty of the crimes in which they had not participated. The concept of collective *responsibility* for crimes committed in your name, on the other hand, was a real but political one, and one for which the German people as a whole *should* accept their collective responsibility.

The problem of dealing with the past, or at least of dealing with it truthfully, after the end of the Second World War, though, was not an exclusively German phenomenon. In post-war France, for example, as previously mentioned, the story of a collaborationist Vichy past, including the deportation and subsequent murder of more than twenty per cent of the country's Jewish population, was reconfigured as one of widespread popular resistance to German rule. Naturally, stories of atrocities committed by French men and women, such as members of the notorious Vichy paramilitary organisation known as the *Milice* (Militia) were inimical to this narrative. Delbo, for instance, told Langer how she tracked down the two men who had arrested her husband and herself following her return, and reported them to the authorities with the necessary evidence to prosecute them. However, the authorities told her that about a year after her arrest the two men had switched allegiance and joined the resistance, fighting bravely until the end of the war, and thus would not be prosecuted for their earlier crimes (Langer, 1995, Introduction: xii).

One can see, therefore, why, for the survivor of a collective catastrophic experience, dealing with the past may be virtually impossible. On a private level, as in the case of a survivor of rape or torture, it is a traumatic experience from which one never completely recovers. On a public level, however, it is a crime in which whole populations are actively or passively implicated, but for which only those who are held directly responsible can be charged and punished, and for which collective responsibility is otherwise typically either denied, or admitted only after it is no longer legally or socially harmful to do so. In the meantime, if the survivor wants to be reconciled with the perpetrator collective, she may have to be prepared to agree to forgive the unforgivable, and forget the unforgettable, and

to accept symbolic admissions of guilt from the innocent and gestures of atonement from those who have nothing to atone for, in lieu of true justice and real retribution. Seen in this light, we can understand how testimony can perform a vital personal role for survivors who do not wish to be reconciled on such humiliating terms, but are powerless to obtain true justice or real retribution, as well as a vital didactic and epistemological public role, though the effect of performing the latter role may be to widen, rather than narrow, the existential chasm between the testifier and the world.

CHAPTER ELEVEN. EPILOGUE

In the course this dissertation I have examined a number of testimonies of survivors relating to catastrophic experiences which are on the face of it not readily comparable: rape, torture, and imprisonment in Auschwitz and other Nazi concentration camps. Each of these testimonies, though, bears witness, in its particular way, to the epistemological, existential and moral chasm which such an experience, and the legacy of living with it as a survivor, creates, and sustains, between the survivor and the world, and also sometimes between the testifier and his or her former self.

The epistemological chasm between the survivor of a catastrophic experience and the world in a testimonial context equates, roughly speaking, to the difference between everything which is known, felt, or remembered by the testifier concerning the catastrophic experience or the experience of surviving it, and that part of such content which can become known to the recipient of his or her testimony in the form of propositional information. The existence of this chasm is a common feature of all the testimonies examined in this dissertation, largely due to the inability of the testifier to communicate his or her subjectively felt *experience* of being a victim or a survivor to those who have not shared that experience. One important manifestation of this inability is the insufficiency of language to convey *feelings*, for example that of the testifier's pain, or hunger. This is not to say, however, that *nothing* worthwhile can be conveyed through descriptive language, beyond propositional information, or that *no* intellectual, moral or spiritual value can be extracted by recipients from phenomenological descriptions by survivors of their experiences. In fact this is surely necessary, if the testifier is to achieve the goal of intellectual and spiritual engagement with his audience as Améry, for example, claimed he wished to do. Delbo, too, though she declared that her sensory experience of Auschwitz could not be understood simply by reading her prose or poetry, nevertheless insisted that she had written it so that her readers could be 'made to see' what she had experienced. In fact conveying something of the *sense* of her experiences through her self-proclaimed 'inadequate' language seems to me to have been her most remarkable artistic achievement.

The existential chasm between the testifier and the world, of which the moral chasm is a part, is determined both by the nature and circumstances of the catastrophic experience, and the testifier's experience of existing as a survivor in the world. The relative importance of the latter experience may well vary considerably depending on a number of factors. One such factor might be the period of time which may have elapsed between the occurrence of the catastrophic experience and the testifier's account of it. Another might be the life choices made by the testifier as a survivor – for example whether he or she has returned to her former home, or emigrated and created a new life with a new identity. Yet another might be the state of mind of the testifier at the time of testifying, or the objective of the testifier in testifying, and no doubt there are other factors to be considered. What is noticeable, though, is that even where there are no signs of a significant existential chasm between the survivor and the world, there is still evidence of an existential *loneliness* – a sense of the testifier feeling cut off from, and perhaps abandoned by, society. There is also a sense, for example in the writing of Delbo and Kluger, both of whom seem to have integrated or reintegrated into post-catastrophic society reasonably successfully, that if one wants to get on with the business of living 'normally' as a survivor, one has to cut oneself off from one's past, and one's former self – to create, in other words, an internalized existential chasm. Levi, on the other hand seems to have managed to reintegrate into society without needing to perform this psychological surgery, by producing his testimony shortly after his return. In his case, catastrophe testimony may thus have acted as a sort of cathartic release valve, as Levi suggested it could, but its effect can equally be psychologically hazardous, as he admitted.

One important aspect of the existential chasm between the survivor and the world which is illuminated by Schlink's book is the particularly complex nature of the dynamic between survivors of collective catastrophic experiences and perpetrator societies. He shows how difficult it can be for survivors to engage with members of such societies on any existentially or morally truthful level , or elicit any recognition of the wrongs done to them The three-stage 'self-rehabilitation' process Schlink describes occurring in post-war German society - aggressive defensiveness and denial, followed by exemplary, but morally dubious, commemoration, and finally compassion fatigue and symbolism - seemed to me to fit Levi's account of his letters from his German readers, and also brought to mind a comment Améry made in an essay broadcast in the mid 1970s entitled 'After Five Thousand

Newspaper Articles' , about how he became a writer. In that article, Améry said of the *'succès d'estime'* (critical success) of his book *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne,* of which he estimated only 7,000 copies were sold:

> I have the suspicion that I merely struck a chord that began to vibrate just at that time when it was still fashionable to occupy oneself with the fate of the Nazi victims and that today…..I couldn't tempt a soul with this book (Améry, 1984: 4)

Perhaps, though, it is only thinking about this societal failure in relation to the enormity of a crime such as the Holocaust which makes it seem so shocking. The fact that crimes which implicate directly or indirectly substantially the whole of societies cannot subsequently be admitted or atoned for by those involved, or that successor generations are unwilling to inherit the responsibility for them, is perhaps simply how it is, how it always was, and in all probability how it will be in the future. The Holocaust is often cited as the most egregious historical example of this phenomenon, in part because the Nazi régime came to power as a result of the exercise of the democratic will of the German people, and, as Levi and Améry both pointed out, remained in power with the general support of the population, including active or passive complicity in, or indifference to, their persecutions of Jews and others. Yet it is far from being the only example of such a phenomenon. Crimes involving individuals, or particular elements of society, on the other hand are obviously easier for society as a whole to recognize, and deal with, though even in such cases it may be necessary to overturn, or at least modify, established societal narratives or myths; for instance that the society in question is one in which women can safely move about on their own, or one which is protective of those who are subjected to sexual abuse or violence. Even more significant obstacles are encountered, though, in cases of violence committed or sanctioned by governments or other state actors, such as the torture of political opponents. Recognition of such crimes normally requires régime change, in order that the perpetrators can be recharacterized as enemies of the state, or at least anti-societal elements within it, and thus more easily denounced and punished.

Is there, then, some other means by which societies can detoxify their past otherwise than at the expense of individual survivors? Some commentators believe that a model for such a process might be found, notwithstanding the imperfections of its implementation, in

the proceedings of tribunals such as the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Critics of the proceedings of the Commission, on the other hand, like Brudholm (2008) regard it as a utilitarian process, in which individual victims of the former apartheid regime were instrumentalized in the interests of social cohesion and the country's future. The Commission invited victims of crimes and atrocities committed against them by servants of the apartheid regime between 1960 and 1994 to give evidence of those crimes or atrocities without cross examination or harassment by defence counsel, in response to applications from the perpetrators for amnesty- immunity from criminal prosecution and civil actions for damages. Alleged perpetrators were not required to show remorse or apologise to victims, nor victims to show forgiveness to perpetrators, the objective being to achieve some kind of catharsis or closure concerning the past, rather than justice in a formal legal sense, for the victims. In practice, however, says Brudholm, leading political actors, such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu, regularly praised those victims who expressed a willingness to forgive as great role models for the country, whilst the Commission's Final Report on its proceedings presented victim responses in terms of a dichotomy between forgiveness or vengeance, leaving no room for intermediate positions which might encourage reconciliation yet also allow victims more opportunity to retain their dignity[59] In essence, Brudholm contends, rather than recognising the victim's right to refuse forgiveness, and to feel anger and resentment towards perpetrators, and harbour desires for retribution against them, the Commission, and leading figures such as Tutu, portrayed these feelings as psychological disorders or spiritual failings which victims should try to overcome. Such 'forgiveness boosterism', argues Brudholm, constitutes an ethical wrong, by reinforcing the harm and disrespect originally suffered by the testifier, and 'compounding' her resentment as a victim with further resentment arising from: (1) the offer of amnesty to perpetrators which deprives victims of their right to seek legal redress and justice for past crimes; and (2) the public celebration of forgiveness and restorative justice which denies and condemns legitimate and righteous resentment (Brudholm, 2008: 57).

The cynic might conclude therefore that the only truly successful means which has been found by societies for meeting the existential and moral challenge of survivor testimony in the case of serious collective crimes committed by them or their predecessors is to avoid

[59] See Brudholm, 2008: 37-8 for concrete examples in support of his argument.

confronting them for as long as possible, and preferably until such time as they can be consigned to what Améry referred to as the 'cold storage of history'. Indeed, in relation to crimes as egregious, and in which so many were actively or passively implicated, as the Holocaust, or other genocides, it may be considered the *only* solution from a utilitarian perspective. Améry predicted in 1966 that this is what would happen in relation to the crimes of the Third Reich, and though he believed his prophesy had been fulfilled in 1977, it is to the great credit of the German people that this turned out not to be the case.

If, then, I had to characterise in a few words how catastrophe testimony most clearly evidences the epistemological, existential and moral chasm between survivors and the world, it would be in terms of two asymmetries. The first is that between the subjectively felt and understood experience of the testifier as a victim and a survivor, on the one hand, and what can be known or understood of that experience by others through the medium of her testimony, on the other. The second asymmetry is that between the hopes and objectives of testifiers in testifying and the capacity or desire of recipients of their testimony to help fulfil them. It is these asymmetries also which mostly account for the distinctions between catastrophe testimony and other kinds of testimony whose principal task is the conveyance of propositional information. Catastrophe testimony certainly typically performs this function, but, beyond this, it is a vehicle for introspection, for the cathartic release, articulation or externalization of traumatic memories, for social, political, cultural or moral education and engagement with the world, and for challenging prevailing public memories, social attitudes, and moral responses, towards victims and survivors, and the past more generally . When Jean Améry said at the end of his *Preface to the First Edition* of *At the Mind's Limits*, that the aim of his study was that it should be of concern to all those who 'wish to live together as fellow human beings', he encapsulated in a few words an affective intent which is for me the mark of true catastrophe testimony.

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